

"Breath *of the* Jungle"

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“Breath of the Jungle”

"Breath of the Jungle"

By

JAMES FRANCIS DWYER

Author of "The Spotted Panther," "The White Waterfall," "The Bust of Lincoln," etc.



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The Bronze Tiger

I

THE BRONZE TIGER

*A Story of American Men in the Valley of Golan Ra
and Their Encounter with the Tiger
of Other Men's Gods*

CURTIS, the American consul, took this story down in longhand the day I staggered into his office. And Curtis believed it, too. He brought me round to his club, bought me a meal and a peg of brandy, gave me a suit of drill and a hand-shake that nearly cracked my knuckles.

"Don't tell it too often when you get back to our country," he said.

"Why?" I asked.

Curtis laughed grimly and looked about him. "Well, they wouldn't get the atmosphere," he said, "and atmosphere is everything when it comes to believing a story. If you told that yarn in a club on Fifth Avenue— No, I'm wrong. They'd believe you! The darn thing drips truth!"

That was a compliment from Curtis. He doubted everybody, but he believed me. He gave me clothes, a meal, and a hand-shake, and he said that the yarn

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dripped truth. I don't know if it does, but here's the story:

I met Masterson at Singapore. He was American on the father's side, I'm sure of that. As to his mother—well, the consul told me that day in his office, that Masterson's grandmother was a Shan-Talok woman from the head of the Meinam. I don't know. There may have been a streak of color in Masterson, but I didn't notice it.

Masterson was going up into the hills above Kopah to collect specimens, and I went with him as an assistant. I dislike work—that is, hard work—but you can't panhandle the Malay. The East is the real home of old Ma Poverty. Starvation walks around with a *chawat* round its loins, and Mr. Death works overtime. That's why I went to work helping Masterson gather specimens of snakes, lizards, bugs, and other things in the hills above Kopah.

“It's nice and interesting work,” he said.

“For the lizards and bugs,” I snapped. “They're being put in bottles and sent to America; we've got to stay to do the recruiting work.”

That was a nasty bit of country round there. Body o' me! Yes! There are some places in the world that are worse than opium. I mean they're more dangerous. The blamed drug is in the air,

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in the hot dawns, in the white sunlight, and the velvety nights. I know it. And those hills above Kopah were worse than any other spot I had struck. That place was too old. There were wandering whiffs of perfume in those hills that got right into the back of my head and rooted out memories that must have been there for centuries—for a score of centuries most likely. They stirred up desires and dreams that must have belonged to ancestors of mine who lived when the mammoth was ornamenting the landscape. Curtis, the American consul, understood when I told him about it. Curtis had been in the East for fourteen years, and he had lost a lot of the cocksureness that he had taken from Washington.

“This country is hell,” said I to Masterson. “It looks as dead as Pharaoh’s chariot mules, and yet it is alive.”

He was bottling a krait, one of those deadly little snakes that lie around in the sand with their heads out waiting to bite anyone or anything that comes near, and he grinned at me.

“The Siyins say that the little grains of sand talk to each other,” he said, “and I believe the Siyins are right. Yes, it’s alive all right.”

That place made me sick. It was the sort of place that the Specters of the Lonely Places would pick for a convention ground. It was so. I tried

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to whistle "Dixie" once or twice in that Valley of Golan Ra, but I gave it up. That spot was too unhealthy for whistling.

We were fixing our tents one afternoon when a real specter came down from the hills above that valley. He was a Burmese monk, and he was a fright. Body o' me! Yes! He was naked except for a dirty waist-cloth; his hair stood out around his head like a thorny halo, and his finger nails were twelve inches long. He was in keeping with the surroundings all right. He was just the sort of apparition you would expect to run across in a place like that.

Masterson spoke to him in the Malay lingo, and he replied in English. Good English, too. Said he was a Buddhist monk from Moulmein, and lived in a little cave high up in the sandstone rocks.

"And why do you stay in this place?" I asked.

"It is a sacred place," he answered. "Buddha rested here on the way to the Temple of Paklan."

"Huh!" I said. "Buddha must have done nothing else but rest. I've seen about two hundred bo-trees that mark places where he squatted."

"But there is more than a bo-tree here," said the monk.

"Why, what's here?" I asked.

"The Man-eater of Golan Ra," he answered quietly.

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Now I think that Masterson had heard something of that man-eater before the monk mentioned him. I'm nearly sure he had. The moment the apparition mentioned the thing, Masterson dropped his specimen-box and came closer to the freak. His eyes were mighty scared-looking too.

"Did that happen here?" he asked.

The freak nodded his head. "It happened right here," he murmured.

"Let the story loose," I said. "I have never heard it." Afterward I was sorry that I had asked that greasy monk to tell the yarn, but feeling sorry for an action does no good.

That fakir was some story-teller. Holy St. Christopher, wasn't he! That yarn went into my brain through every hair I had in my head. He chanted it like a Batta chanting a war-song, and I just gasped as I sat on the hot sand and listened. Masterson was pop-eyed, too. That monk was a devil of a story-teller.

He said that Buddha had rested at that place on his way to the Temple of Paklan. Budd was tired, mighty tired. He sat down in the shade to rest himself, and while he was sitting there a big man-eating tiger came down from the sandstone ridges and peeped at him from behind a thorn bush. Peeped at Buddha, mind you!

Do you know that funny music the orchestra

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grinds out when they want to give the audience cold shivers down its back? Well, that monk could do that stunt with his voice. Wow, couldn't he just! He soft-pedaled on the descriptive business concerning that tiger peeking round the bush till he had Masterson and me rubbering at the stunted cactus clumps, thinking that another tiger might be peeping at us. The Oriental is the greatest storyteller in the world. He puts shadows into his stories, and those shadow masses stir your imagination just the way it should be stirred. And that fakir in the Valley of Golan Ra was the boss of all the narrators we had ever met. That tiger liked the look of Buddha. Buddha was fat, and the tiger was hungry. The brute was a bit of a gourmet, and he had grown tired of eating skinny Negritos. They gave him indigestion. He licked his chops as he watched the fat saint mumbling his prayers, and he breathed so excitedly that old Buddha heard him and looked up.

The tiger sort of grinned at Buddha, but Buddha took no notice. He was busy thinking out some mighty big problems, and he had no time for grinning at tigers. That's what the fakir said. The boss monk in the Temple of Paklan had been grafting a little, and the saint was thinking out a plan to fix him.

That greasy monk was an actor of the first water.

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Wow, wasn't he a dandy! He put up a piece of rock to represent Buddha, while he took the part of Mr. Tiger, and all the time he was pouring out the descriptive matter.

The tiger came out from behind the bush and walked forward a little. He thought that Buddha might be a little short-sighted. That brute had been in the habit of seeing Malays and Negritos bolt in every direction when he poked his head around a corner, and he was just a little bit surprised to see old Budd still juggling with his prayer-cord. It hurt his vanity to see a respectable old gentleman ignore him completely, and he gave a little growl to show the saint that he was a real full-grown specimen of a hill tiger.

That growl annoyed Buddha. At least, the fakir said that it annoyed him. The tiger had a breath, and the growl sent the odor of that breath under the saint's nose. He stopped praying and waved the tiger away, but the tiger's stomach was troubling him too much at that moment. Buddha looked fat and sweet to him. He crept a little closer, and the saint got mad. I'm just telling what that monk told to Masterson and myself in the Valley of Golan Ra.

"Go back!" said Buddha, but the tiger only drew his lips back in a sneer. I guess he thought that Buddha was having a little joke before he handed in his checks.

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“Go back to the hills!” cried the saint. “Go back at once!”

But that tiger had no word like retreat in his dictionary. Not much. He just walloped his ribs furiously with the end of his tail and crouched on his haunches before making a spring at the saint.

Buddha was as cool as a mudfish according to the story of the monk. He just eyed the tiger, and the tiger returned the stare. That fool brute was wondering why Buddha didn't pick up his gown and bolt across the sand. That was what the Negritos used to do, and it always amused the tiger to do a little run after them before making an evening meal off them.

“Now,” said Buddha, “if you spring you will be sorry, very sorry.”

The tiger, so the monk reckoned, stiffened his muscles and licked his chops. Buddha's threats didn't frighten him much. He gave one little growl as a signal to himself to be ready, another little growl as a signal to be steady, and when he gave the third little growl he lifted himself into the air. But Buddha did something at that moment. Mind you, this part of the yarn is not mine, I'm only telling what the monk said in that dead Valley of Golan Ra. And that monk was a champion at telling a story. When he got up to the part where the tiger was going to hop at Buddha, he had us fairly creepy

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with curiosity. Yes, sir! That was no bit of fiction as far as he was concerned. It was twenty-two carat gospel, and that was why he was able to make us shiver like frozen hoboes when he got to the climax.

“Yes, yes,” gasped Masterson, “what happened then?”

“Why,” said the monk, sinking his voice till it was only a whisper, “when Buddha lifted his hand the tiger’s spring was arrested. He stopped in mid-air. It was as if he were petrified instantly, and as Buddha continued to pray the old man-eater was turned slowly to bronze. Into bronze, sirs. He became a piece of statuary, his body erect, his fore paws stretched out, and only the pads of his hind feet on the ground.”

I don’t know whether it was the surroundings that made us scared, or whether it was the manner in which that fakir told the story, but when he finished we were pop-eyed. Wow, yes! There was never a story-teller like that Buddhist monk, and there was never a place that fitted so well as a background for such a yarn as that weird Valley.

Masterson didn’t speak for a few minutes after the freak had finished his story, then he moistened his lips and put a question.

“Where is the tiger that was turned into bronze?” he asked.

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I expected that monk to say that someone had stolen that statue, but I got a surprise—a mighty big surprise. He just turned and waved his skinny hand toward a patch of thorn that was about five hundred yards away, and said simply, “He is out there.”

It’s hard to make anyone feel what we felt in that wilderness. Curtis, the American consul, understood, but he had been fourteen years in that God-forsaken country.

“Show him to us,” said Masterson.

It was dusk then, the curious tropical dusk that comes down like a purple veil before the thick night swoops down. The monk started to walk toward that patch of thorn, and Masterson and I followed. Masterson was all nerves at that moment. The day had affected him more than it had affected me. That air was like opium to him, and after he had listened to the story he walked like a man in a dream. If anyone could have canned that atmosphere of Golan Ra, they could have sold it to dope fiends. It was one of the most peculiar spots I had ever seen. There are thousands of places in the tropics that look unhealthy and feel unhealthy, but the Valley of Golan Ra was vicious. I don’t know if I make my meaning clear by saying that. Curtis understood when I told him about it.

“I know the atmosphere,” he said. “It’s poison-

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ous. The country has been left too much to itself, and it doesn't want a white man near."

The consul was right. That valley didn't want Masterson or me. The monk fitted into the surroundings, but we didn't. We knew it, but we followed that fakir across the sand that was still so hot that you felt it through the soles of your shoes, and so dry that you could hear a lizard rustling through it twenty feet away.

The monk circled the clump of cactus and stunted camel's-thorn, then he stopped and pointed with his thin hand.

"There he is," he whispered. "There is the Man-eater of Golan Ra!"

Body o' me! I got a shock when I looked at the spot he pointed out. The sight we saw hit us so hard that we stopped in our tracks with our mouths open. I know a little about tigers, so does Masterson, but the man who modeled the big bronze tiger at Golan Ra knew more about tigers than all the naturalists between Penang and Philadelphia. That's the truth. The Kachins of Northern Burma tell of the tiger-men who live and hunt with the tigers, and the man who made that statue must have been one of that breed. He must have lived with tigers. He must have watched them till he knew every muscle in their bodies. Wow, Wow, Wow! What a statue it was! It flamed with life.

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That was the genius in it. Genius! Why, when we came in front of that thing we stepped aside in fear!

Someone will cry about Antoine Louis Barye when they read this. Barye never did anything like that. Never! I've seen a lot of Barye's work, but I have never seen anything like that tiger. Holy St. Christopher! No! Barye's tiger in the Tuilleries is not to be compared with that brute in the wastes of Golan Ra. Barye's stuff is dead. That tiger in the valley between the hills was so full of life that you crouched instinctively as you came in front of him.

I didn't wonder about the Buddha yarn being woven about that beast. Not much! It was beyond the intelligence of those hill tribes to think that an artist modeled that thing. They gambled on supernatural influence, and of course they picked Buddha. Anyone with the smallest particle of imagination would think that the brute had been turned into bronze as he was about to spring.

Masterson looked at me, and swallowed like a pelican. In the dim light the thing looked uncanny. It did so. And that walking bag of bones knew that he had handed us a surprise packet.

“In the night,” he said, turning to Masterson, “he is very lonely. He calls to the tigers in the hills, and they come down and keep him company.”

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"Who calls?" I snapped.

"Buddha's tiger," said the monk. "He calls to his brothers up in the sandstone ridges, and they come down to him. There are a hundred tigers here every night."

The East is a curious place. I wanted to laugh, and I couldn't laugh. I thought I could rid myself of the irritating fear that gripped me if I were able to ridicule that old naked fool's story, but I couldn't raise a grin. The look of that tiger choked back any laughs that I tried to put forward.

Masterson stooped and looked for tracks in the sand, then he looked at me with a stupid look on his face. The atmosphere of that valley had played the mischief with Masterson's nerves. He looked like a man who has been hit with a sand-bag.

"They come every night," murmured the monk. "They come down to him when he cries."

"Huh," I grunted, "they're real obliging tigers, ain't they?" I don't know whether the story or the place upset my courage, but I was scared—scared in that curious way when your courage seems to be penned in a corner fighting against a fear that you can't get a grip on.

"Do you know that no harm can come to one who is near him?" asked the monk.

"How?" I growled.

"If anyone places his hand on him and cries out

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to Buddha, no harm can come to him,” he answered. “No tiger will touch him. The Holy Buddha has willed it so. Only a few days ago a Malay, pursued by a tiger, rushed down here from the hills and touched the statue. When he did so the tiger that was pursuing him ran away.”

You would think that a remark of that kind would make us laugh, but it didn't. It was getting dark, and that place had a look that chilled our blood. But we didn't want to show the white feather in front of that dirty Buddhist monk. Not much! We had picked up our rifles when leaving the camp: it isn't safe to wander round without a gun in those hills, and when that fakir told the story about the tigers coming down from the hills I got a fool notion into my head to draw his bluff.

Masterson must have got the same idea at the exact moment I pounced on it. He looked around at a couple of stunted trees that were about twenty yards from the statue, and then looked at me.

“We might wait and see if there is any truth in the yarn,” he said. “I mean the tale about the tigers coming down from the hills.”

“Sure,” I answered. “We'll wait by all means.”

“What are you going to do?” asked the monk.

“We're going to stay around and see this tiger gathering,” I said. “We'll build a platform between those two stunted trees.”

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“Can I stay?” he asked quietly.

“Stay if you like,” said Masterson. “Help us get some timber together.”

Masterson and I worked like madmen collecting timber to build a platform between those two small trees, and the monk helped us without speaking. And all the time it was getting darker in that valley. Darker? Why, it was that dark when we finished the perch that we felt as if we were crawling through something tangible as we climbed onto the platform we had hurriedly put together.

We couldn't see the bronze tiger, but we seemed to feel him. That's a curious way of putting it, but it's the only way that can explain our sensations. That piece of work had made a mighty funny impression on us, and we could easily understand how stories had sprung up about it. In that dreary waste of sand and stunted thorn bush that tiger seemed to be the only thing alive. Alive, mind you! The rocks were dead, the hills were dead, the cactus and stunted trees, and even the monk, looked as if they held on to existence by the skin of their teeth, as the saying is, but the tiger seemed to flame with life.

Genius is a wonderful thing. They tell a story in the Shan states of a man who made a hamadryad that was so wonderfully lifelike that the natives died with fear after looking at it, and I could believe

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that story after seeing the Tiger of Golan Ra. He was alive to that greasy monk. Body o' me! Yes! Right in my heart I knew that the fakir worshiped the thing, and as we crouched on the shaky platform between the two trees I knew that he was staring toward the spot where the tiger stood.

"It's devilish quiet," muttered Masterson, after we had been squatting there for about an hour.

"Quiet?" I growled. "I'm praying for an earthquake to come along and burst this infernal silence."

Wow, wasn't it quiet! I guess we could have heard a British-India steamer hoot in the Bay of Bengal if that silence strata had run all the way to the coast. That was how it seemed to me. And every minute of that terrific silence seemed to act like a vise that was squeezing out of me everything that was human and vital. I don't know whether it was that way with Masterson, but I had to wriggle my limbs occasionally just to rid myself of the belief that I was becoming petrified.

We were on that platform about four hours before anything happened. Then matters began to get lively. The monk touched our sleeves with his long fingers, and we put our best ears to the breeze.

"They're coming," whispered the fakir.

"Who?" gasped Masterson.

"The tigers," breathed the monk. "I can hear them coming down from the hills. When they get

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on the sand, you will hear Buddha's tiger cry out to them."

I felt inclined to knock that freak off the platform when he said that. I felt that we had done a foolish thing in waiting round that place, and I blamed the monk for making us build that perch. A kind of fear gripped me at that moment that I had never experienced before. Never!

A nigger can hear a tiger long before a white man can hear him, and it was some minutes before I heard a noise. Masterson heard them before I did. He was crouched close to me, and I felt his muscles stiffen with excitement. Masterson was all nerves, just then. The atmosphere of that valley, together with the story of the monk, had upset him completely.

"They're coming," he breathed. "They're coming."

"Hush," I whispered. "Be quiet."

In the tremendous silence that was over that place, my skin seemed to feel the soft padding of those brutes approaching. Tigers? Of course they were tigers! And you can understand how it struck us after listening to the story that the freak had told. I pictured him grinning in the darkness. There is nothing pleases a nigger better than to get the laugh on a white man, and that fakir had sensed our skepticism when he unbottled that yarn.

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I gripped my rifle and peered over the edge of the platform into the darkness that heaved beneath us like masses of black cotton wadding. Wow, wasn't it dark! And out of that infernal thick night came little snuffles and snarls that made me put a few pertinent questions to myself.

“What brings them to this spot?” I asked myself. “Why the deuce do they come down from the hills to the bronze statue? What fakery is at the bottom of it?”

Just as I was trying to puzzle the matter out, the monk gripped my arm and brought his mouth close to my face.

“Now Buddha's tiger will cry out to them,” he whispered. “Listen!”

I got a chill down my spinal column when he said that. I was listening with every inch of my skin. I wanted to hear that cry. That naked monk had me scared right down to my shoes, and I knew that Masterson was just as bad. Mind you, Masterson had plenty of grit at most times, but all his grit had been sucked out of him by the surroundings on that evening at Golan Ra.

“Listen!” whispered the monk. “Now he will cry out to them to let them know that he is lonely.”

The fakir timed it exactly. The cry came at the moment he finished speaking. It split the silence like a projectile of sound, and it nearly made Masterson

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leap from the platform. It was a scream with a point to it. It knocked me so silly that I couldn't think of a thing.

"Did you hear?" whispered the monk. "Buddha's tiger is calling."

I tried to answer that freak, but I couldn't. That scream had paralyzed my tongue. I damned myself for nine different kinds of a fool as I crouched waiting. I knew how Masterson was. He was about eighteen degrees worse than I was.

I peered into that darkness, feeling mighty angry and mighty foolish. I pushed the rifle over the edge of the platform, and waited for something that would let me know where one of those brutes was prowling.

The monk sensed what I was about to do, and his long fingers clutched my arm. "Don't!" he whispered. "Don't! You will annoy Buddha's tiger if you shoot his kinsfolk here. Listen! He is calling again."

That cry came again, and I was as stupid as a stuffed mongoose. My, didn't it chill me! I wanted to let fly at one of the brutes that snuffled and snarled in the dark, just because I thought that the report of the rifle would bring back my courage. Noise is a great spine-stiffener for the noise-maker, I can tell you.

"Let him cry!" I gasped, and as I spoke the cry

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went up again. It was an animal's cry, but it was a cry of fear that would chill the heart of a road agent.

“Don't shoot!” cried the monk. “Don't!”

He made a grab at my arm, but I pushed him back. A huge pair of emeralds appeared under the tree at that instant and I let fly.

Body o' me! Didn't that shot start a rumpus! I'd give a few dollars to know how many tigers were around that statue. Just to satisfy my own curiosity, that's all. Those hills are famous for tigers, and it was some convention that had assembled there. You bet it was.

Masterson was pretty funky just then. I was scared, but he was clean out of his wits with fright. I was looking for another pair of green eyes to help my courage a bit, but he reached over and gripped my shoulder.

“Let them alone!” he gasped. “Let them alone!”

“Shucks!” I spluttered, and just at that moment I caught sight of another pair of blazing emeralds, and I let fly.

Suffering sinners! Didn't I get a shock when I banged at him! That tiger must have been as big as the bronze statue. He must have been. The bullet stirred his temper, and the brute sprang at us.

He couldn't reach that platform, but he did as

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much damage as if he had reached it. The big brute cannoned against one of the stunted trees, and the trunk of that tree had been bored through by the teredo ant! My hair prickled mightily badly as I felt that heavy brute strike it. The tree started to crack near the ground, and with a dickens of a hubbub the timbers of the platform, Masterson, the mad monk, and myself flopped heavily to the sand!

A piece of timber walloped me on the back of the head as I struck the ground, and I guess it was some minutes before I regained consciousness. It might have been an hour for all I know. I tried to get up, but I couldn't. I listened to see if I could hear the tigers, but there wasn't a sound. Something had stampeded the brutes at the moment the platform fell, and they had bolted for the hills. I was just wondering what had become of Masterson and the monk when their voices came out of the silence, and I listened. You bet I did. When I told this part of the story to Curtis, the American consul, he nodded his head and told me about Masterson's grandmother. I guess Curtis was right. If she was a Shan-Talok woman, a night like that was the kind to bring the breeding out of him. Do you know what that brace were doing? They were praying to Buddha at the very top of their lungs.

"Keep your hands on the tiger and pray!" shouted the monk. "Don't take your hands from

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him. He has saved you from the tigers as the Holy One willed.”

I tried to crawl toward them, but that smash on the back of the head was too much for me. I fainted away again, and as I fell on the sand I heard Masterson repeating a singsong prayer that the Buddhist priest was chanting through his nose.

It was dawn when I came to my senses. I lifted myself up and stared about me, but there were no signs of Masterson and the monk. That big bronze tiger stood up in the dawnlight with his paws stretched out in front of him, but the fakir and his convert, they had both cleared out.

“Took him away before dawn, so that he wouldn’t see anything,” I muttered, and then I dragged myself over to the statue.

It was mighty plain to me what brought those brutes from the hills when I reached the bronze tiger. There had been a little feast there if I could judge by the look of things. Some confederate of that greasy monk had sneaked up in the darkness and left a live gibbon tied to the statue, and it was that gibbon that had howled when he knew the tigers were on him. He had kept quiet till he knew that they had winded him. I guess that little feast had been spread for them every night for months, so the monk had a sure guess when he told his little story to us.

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That's mighty near all I have to tell. Two weeks afterward I found the empty cave where the monk used to live. Under a stone near the door was a note from Masterson asking me to tell his employers at Washington that he had thrown up his job. That was all. A leprous Negrito told me that Masterson and the monk had gone to a Buddhist temple farther up the mountains, and I let him go. I had enough of those hills.

I told Masterson's boss in Washington that he had thrown the collecting job. The boss was a big fat man, so I didn't bother telling him the story of that night at Golan Ra.

"Thrown it?" he cried. "Why, there's no one out there who could give him more money than what we were giving him. Do you think there is?"

"Search me!" I said, and with that I left him there to puzzle the matter over. He wouldn't have believed me if I told him everything. But Curtis, the consul, believed it. He took me to the club, gave me a meal, a peg of brandy, and a suit of drill. And he said that the yarn dripped truth. But Curtis had been out there long enough to understand the country and to know what effect the atmosphere of a place like Golan Ra would have on a man who had a dash of color in his blood.

The Soul Trapper

II

THE SOUL TRAPPER

*The Story of a Man Who Went Mad and a
Woman's Fight for His Life*

“**B**UT a white woman did come to this spot,” said the German naturalist, stretching himself on the plaited Dyak mat. “There is no place on the earth where a man goes that a woman will not follow if the necessity arises, and for that I thank God. This Samarahan River is as near hell as you can go without making a hole in the wall, yet a woman came here.”

“A collector?” I asked.

“No, no! I would hate to see a woman come to this place to trap monkeys or gather bugs, or do anything like that. This woman came to—well, she came to trap a man's soul.”

“Tell me,” I said.

Hochdorf, the greatest naturalist in the Malay Archipelago, who knew more of the ways of animals than any of the seventy collectors employed by the big Amsterdam firm, spoke soothingly to a black monkey that whined in the shadow. The tropical

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night had rolled down from Asia, and a tremendous silence had come in its train. A new moon rode high over the tops of the jungle, where sandalwood, teak, kaladang, and mohor, in league-wide masses, resembled an ebony base upon which the dome of the heavens was softly resting.

“I will tell you first of the man,” said Hochdorf quietly. “We will call him Hanslaw, that is as good a name as any, and he came from Baltimore, over there in the United States. He had the bungalow on the other side of the river, the one just below the Dyak village that I showed you this morning, and after he was here some time we became great friends. He was a fine naturalist, none better. He loved his work, and he would not stop from dawn till midnight.

“‘Hanslaw,’ I would say, ‘you are a fool to work like that. You are just what all you Americans are, just a bundle of nerves, and if you go pounding along like that, something will stop all of a sudden in your head, and you will go up like a rocket on the Kaiser’s birthday.’

“‘I’ve got to make good, Hochdorf,’ he would say. ‘I’ve got to make good, and make good quick. Work is nothing if you have the right incentive to work, and by all that is holy, I have that incentive.’

“That was all he would say. Just that. Work was nothing to him. The hours that he spent in a

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wet singlet curing and fixing things did not trouble him. I envied him. Who would not? Just because there was a woman over there in the United States, six thousand miles from this little hell in Borneo, he could not feel tired. It is wonderful.

“ ‘ You are an old bachelor and you do not understand,’ he would say.

“ ‘ Bachelors have done some big things,’ I would snap back at him.

“ ‘ Perhaps so,’ he would laugh, ‘ but by the bones of the great Cuvier, Hochdorf, it is the man that the woman is watching who has put the marks of his knuckles on this old mud ball.’

“ He was only a big boy, but he was a great naturalist in spite of his youth.

“ It was no good speaking to him about taking it easy. Through the smoke from that stinking slush lamp he saw her eyes looking at him from way over in Baltimore, and he would not stop. In the night sometimes I would get out of my bed and look across the river, and no matter when I looked his light would be still burning.

“ Then one day the thing that I said came about. He snapped up. Something in the back of his head gave way like a piece of elastic. He was working on the skeleton of a *simia wurmbii*, the big orang-outang, and he laid down his knife quietly, very, very quietly, and he went out and started to play

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with the little pebbles on the bank of the river. *Gott steh uns bei!* It was so. It chilled my blood.

“ ‘ Hanslaw,’ I said, ‘ what is up, my friend? Get up and leave those pebbles alone.’

“ But he would not get up. He sat there on his hams like a hill Kyan, and he played with those little bits of stone like a three-year-old baby. It is not nice to see anything happen like that. Not to a man with brains. And Hanslaw had brains. *Ja!*

“ What was I to do with a man in that condition in this little hell? Seventeen miles down the river was Brechmann, but Brechmann knew less about such things than I did. Hanslaw had blown up— *puff*— just like that. It made me sick and it made those Dyaks wonder a bit. It was the first example that those fool niggers had ever seen of the quick-lunch methods you have over there in the United States. They had never seen a man’s brain go *pop*, just because there was three hundred pounds of pressure on a machine that was not strong enough to bear half that amount.

“ This place is not so bad if one is in the best of health, but if you are sick— well, it is hell to be sick when you are out on the rim of the earth. If Hanslaw had met with an accident or if he were suffering from malaria it would have been different. The Dyaks cured my leg with a plaster of blue mud when I nearly cut it off with an ax. And I had much

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quinine if it had been a fever. But it was neither a cut nor a fever. A belt had slipped from one of the little flywheels in the back of Hanslaw's brain, my friend, and a job like that is something that God Almighty must attend to in His own good time.

“For eight days he loafed around the bungalow, doing no work and talking little, and in those eight days something happened that was peculiar. It was more than peculiar. When that little belt slipped off the flywheel in his head, it made him lose connection with that part of his brain that had been built up through centuries of civilization. Do you understand? He just crawled out of a husk that civilization had put around him. The veneer of the centuries peeled off him like the skin of the milk snake when he sloughs it in the rirro grass, and Hanslaw, the greatest naturalist that had ever come to this infernal archipelago, became a savage. It was what you might call a backward migration of the soul. Or perhaps the soul left him altogether. People say that we cannot see into those other lives that we have left behind us, but Hanslaw went back into one of them. *Ja!* The thing might not have happened if he was in the city at the time the belt slipped off his mental flywheel, but here the jungle was all around him, and the jungle is impressive. It lays its hands on men who are in their right senses, so you can guess how it gripped Hanslaw

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when he had ripped off the protecting cyst that civilization had slowly wrapped round him. Then there were the Dyaks to copy from. Do you see?

“His brain was like a bit of new clay, and it picked up impressions like a dry sponge sucks up water. He flung off his clothes, tied a *chawat* of bark cloth around his waist and did things native fashion, and it hurt me to see that. He broke up specimen cases to make fish traps, and he did not know they were specimen cases when he broke them up. Yet he had lectured me about Humboldt a few nights before!

“On the eighth day Brechmann came up the river because I had sent him a message telling him what had happened, and we held a consultation about Hanslaw. He was fishing with the Dyaks in the river while we talked, and he fished better than any of them. And that is saying a lot. But the wonder of it was that he had never spent any time fishing till that flywheel went wrong in his brain. Do you see? In eight days he had learned all the tricks that the niggers knew about fishing, and he had brought five-score new tricks out from the back of his brain where some ancestor of his, dead a thousand years or so, had stored them. That was the marvel to me. I knew that he had never seen a dozen crocodiles till he came to Borneo, and I know that he never attempted to catch one of those ugly devils

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in his life before that day he started to play with the pebbles, yet he could beat all those natives at the business after a few days. He tackled one of those dirty monsters with as much composure as I tackle a glass of beer, and it was not the Dyak fashion of killing it that he used. *Nein!* It was a quicker and a better way, and it made those niggers wonder. This little pinch of gray matter that we have in our skulls plays some funny tricks with us at times.

“ ‘We should take him down to the coast,’ said Brechmann. ‘It is bad to let a white man run wild with the niggers.’

“ ‘*Ja,*’ I said. ‘If we could get him on a tramp steamer and get him up to Singapore, his consul might look after him.’

“ ‘Will we start now?’ asked Brechmann.

“ ‘No, we will leave it till the morning,’ I said. ‘We will invite him on a trip down to your place, and if he gets suspicious we must kidnap him.’

“Now I know that Hanslaw did not hear what Brechmann and I had planned to do. We took good care to be out of hearing when we talked the matter over, but instinct is better than hearing. Hanslaw had his instincts sharpened when that flywheel went wrong. You bet he had. That was how he knew which way to jump when the crocodile lashed out with his tail. His skin felt things the same as that of a wild animal. And he felt that Brechmann

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and I were scheming something that concerned him. That is so. In the morning when we were making preparations to go down the river he bolted. Yes, he bolted into the jungle. I told you he had become a better savage than the natives. Well, he was. We went in pursuit of him with a crowd of Dyaks, and he made fools of us. We were—what is that word you use? Ah, tenderfoot! We were tenderfeet compared to him in his knowledge of the jungle. *Mein Gott*, yes! He fooled us like as if we were so many children. He chattered like the orang-outang, and he laughed when he found that we could not tell his cries from the cries of the monkeys. We had never heard such imitations.

“Brechmann got tired of chasing him after a day or two, and he went back to his camp, leaving me with the difficulty on my hands. It was not a nice thing to spend the day thinking over. Not much! My brain is slow, and I act like an old woman in a matter of that kind. I tried every way to get the madman back to the bungalow, but it was no good.

“Three weeks after he had bolted, a mail came up from the coast. There was a letter for Hanslaw from that place, Baltimore, that he came from over there in the United States, and I opened that letter. That is so. It was a beautiful letter. Never have I read such a letter. It made me feel sorry to think that I had no one to write me letters like that. I

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think I could have worked as Hanslaw worked if I had. I think so. Hanslaw said that Love was the big lever that moved the world. I believe him now. The day before his brain threw the somersault he quoted some lines of verse to me, and I did not understand those lines till I read that letter. Yes, I remember the lines. Let me see, they ran like this:

Methinks no leaf would ever bud in spring,
But for the lovers' lips that kiss, the poets' lips that sing.

“You think it is strange that I, an old bachelor who is trapping animals in this wilderness, should remember those lines. Wait till I tell you all of the story and then you will not think it strange. You will understand why I remember.

“I read that letter eight, twelve, twenty times, then I sat down and wrote an answer to it. It was the first time I had written to a girl since I left Bonn. That is funny, is it not? But I tried my best to write that girl a good letter. You are wondering if I told her everything, are you not? Yes, I did tell her all that I knew. *Ja*, I did. I told her how he had worked through the days and through the tropical nights when the hot smells get up off the ground and take you with their cursed fingers till you drip with perspiration, and I told her how the little belt had slipped from the flywheel

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in his brain. It was no good trying to lie to the woman who wrote that letter. Not one bit. I told her how we had chased him into the jungle, and how he had mocked us by imitating the big *simia satyrus*. My, I never did such a bit of writing in all my life. When I had finished it I sent it down to the coast with two of the Dyaks, and then I went about my work. If Hanslaw was crazy I could not give his craziness as an excuse to my employers.

“But that madman tried to make me as much of a lunatic as the Fates had made himself. He would come down here by the river at night and howl at me. That was pleasant, wasn't it? He would howl at me from the trees, and then he would sneak softly up to the windows of the bungalow and send rocks flying among my specimens. It was the devil.

“Brechmann came up the river and he grinned when I told him of the tricks that Hanslaw was up to. It amused him because he was seventeen miles away.

“‘Shoot a charge of salt at him,’ he said. ‘Shoot it at his bare legs, and I bet he knows enough to keep away from your place.’

“‘No, I will not do that,’ I said. ‘If Hanslaw was in his right mind he would sooner cut off his head than harm one of my specimens.’

“‘Salt is a good thing,’ said Brechmann. ‘It is the best persuader that you can find.’

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“‘You go back where you came from!’ I screamed. ‘It is not your specimens that he is playing the mischief with. Clear out and leave me to mind my own business!’

“And he did clear out, wondering whether I had snapped something in the back of my head like Hanslaw had done.

“But Hanslaw kept me mighty busy in the nights that followed. He bombarded this place till the volleys of stones took my memory back to Gravelotte when the French Chasseurs tickled us some. One would think that the mad devil had a hundred arms to judge by the way he sent the stones down on this place. He made my life a misery. I could not open a window to get a breath of air, and if I sat in the dark with a door open he seemed to know. He had cat’s eyes. He ruined much of my best work, but when I would be that angry that I could kill him, I would think of that girl’s letter.

“It went on like that for three months, then one morning while I was skinning a crocodile down on the bank of the river, I saw a boat coming up the stream. There were four Dyaks pulling it, and someone else was sitting in the stern. I stood up and watched it, and I don’t know what I felt like just then. Something came up in my throat that was bigger than the ball on Strasburg Cathedral. *Ach Gott!* I took a new view of the world at that

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minute. Just before I saw the boat everything looked bad and crooked. I was as poisonous as a red-necked cobra, then everything was changed. Hanslaw told the truth. The flowers would not bud in the spring if it was not for love. I, an old bachelor, who has not heard a good woman laugh for fifteen years, I tell you that. It is the truth, and it is from the lookers-on that you get the truth.

“I think I helped her out of that boat when it grounded on the stinking mud. I am doubtful to this day if I did. I have an idea sometimes that I stood there like a badly-stuffed specimen. Can you think what a task that woman set herself in coming from Baltimore to this hell? Can you imagine it? It made the sweat run down my face when I thought of what she had put up with in coming up the river with four dirty naked niggers. There are no Cook excursions around Borneo, my friend.

“‘You are Mr. Hochdorf,’ she said, when she put her little hand into my big, dirty paw. ‘I want to thank you for your letter.’

“That was all she said. You would think that I was expecting her, and that it was not six thousand miles of a run between the United States and Borneo. I cried. I cried to think that the world is not as bad as some bilious devils make out. Out on this God-forgotten place I was witnessing something that poets could sing of. *Ja*. It was good to

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think that there were women like her in the world. I cannot tell you of the feelings that she stirred in me. A man may read of an act, but when he sees it—*Ach!* It is different.

“She did not ask any questions, and that is the wonder of it. Is it not? She just looked at me and at the cursed jungle that was crushing in all around the bungalow, and she seemed to know everything that I knew. I cannot make it clear to you, but she understood things in a way that puzzled me.

“Do you know, she never mentioned Hanslaw all that day? Well, she did not. She did not mention his name. She just sat by that little window and stared at the trees. Once only she looked at me, and I said: ‘Some time before midnight,’ before I could stop myself. And she nodded when I said it.

“She did not eat anything much. She just nibbled like a canary, and I knew that she was praying for the night. That madman was somewhere up in the hills sleeping, but I knew that he would be down to give my bungalow a bombardment when the night came down thick.

“When the darkness fell like a blanket, she stood up and walked to the door, and I stood up too.

“‘Miss Leslie,’ I said, ‘you must not go far. You are in a wilderness.’

“‘I am only going into the clearing,’ she said. ‘I promise you that I will not go further.’

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"She looked at me with those big blue eyes of hers that Hanslaw used to see through the smoke of the slush lamp when he was working, and then she went quietly out into the dark. The moon was not up, and the night was so thick that you would think it possible to cut up the darkness into cubes and build things out of it. A tropical night has a breed of blackness that you will not find anywhere else. It made me nervous to let her go, but I knew it was no use trying to stop her, and I knew that she wanted to go by herself. She had come six thousand miles to do something, and I was nothing in the scheme of things. Nothing at all.

"But I was nervous. You know how some nights are more silent than others? Well, this was one of those silent nights. You cannot get them in the city, but in the jungle they are plentiful. The atmosphere was that heavy that you felt inclined to put up your hand and push it off the back of your neck.

"About an hour after the girl went out I called to her, and she answered me from that big tapang tree in the clearing. 'I am all right,' she said. 'Please do not worry about me.'

"But I could not keep from worrying about her. I strained that thick night for noises till my ears ached, and every time a twig cracked in the jungle I was at the door with my neck poked forward like a water snake. It was a night when you would ex-

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pect things to happen, and that graveyard silence made me perspire, I tell you.

“I was just going to call out again to the girl when that thick night air was set quivering. It was like as if little threads of purple and silver and gold were being threaded in and out of the dark patches, and I gasped. She was singing. She was singing out there in the night, and I had never heard such singing. No, I did not. I forgot that I was in Borneo when I heard it. It just crushed out the darkness and the loneliness of this inferno and lifted me up and took me ten thousand miles away. Mother of me! Yes. It had that soft croon in it that a mother breathes to a sick baby, and you cannot hear that every day. I wish we could, don't you? It would keep us wholesome and clean, perhaps.

“I moved out of the doorway and listened. Her voice was as sweet as the silver tulip bell at the Dilwara Temple. It did not spring at you like some voices. It swirled around and around like silk lariats, and you could not tell whether she was in the clearing or across the river. It was wonderful. I have never heard such singing.

“She stopped for a second as if she wished to listen, and before the notes of her song had died away, a stone crashed against the window of the bungalow, and a hyena laugh went up into the night

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like a brass blare. I was never more sick in my life than at the moment I heard that devilish scream. It was terrible. I had to sit down on the step because I had no strength to stand. I was sick with the thoughts of what she was suffering.

“The girl started to sing again, and there was no more laughing. And there were no more stones. She sang and sang and sang, and the jungle listened. *Gott*, it was weird! I never felt the mystery of this place till that night. Somewhere in the tree masses was a man whose soul had gone out of his body, and she was trying to bring it back. Perhaps you cannot see how big it was to me on that night, but I tell you that I never heard anything like it. I am not the most emotional of men, but I have never had such strange sensations in my life. Her singing went into the very marrow of my being, and made me feel as if I had come up against something that the world had overlooked in its haste to make dollars. I don't know what it was. I cannot explain it to you. But it was a soul calling to a soul. *Ach*, yes!

“I stayed awake all through the night. There were no more stones or no more laughter. But she sang on. Toward dawn, when the first bit of baby pink came up out of Micronesia, I shook myself and stumbled down through the clearing. She was standing near the tapang tree where she had been

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eight hours before, and I took her by the arm and led her inside the bungalow. Her dress was all wet with the dew, and her face was as white as the snow on the Himalayas. But she never spoke. Not one word about the night. Not a single word.

“The next night it was nearly the same thing over again. But there was one exception. That madman threw a stone at the bungalow, but he did not laugh his infernal hyena laugh. He crept away quietly after he had thrown the rock, and to me that was wonderful. For three months he had been doing that nightly howl, and suddenly he became dumb. It was strange, wasn't it?

“And the next night he threw stones, but it did not seem to give him the devilish amusement that he got out of the business before she started to sing. No, it did not. He did his little cannonade and then he crept away or listened to her in the trees. But the fact that he was somewhere near and yet not visible to her, was making that girl suffer. I saw that. She was being crucified by the black jungle that held him from her ; but there was nothing for me to do. Once I hinted at some scouting work, but I dropped that hint in a hurry. It was not on her program. All I could do was to sit and wait, and try and coax her to eat something that would keep her strength up.

“Night after night she sang in different places

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around the bungalow, and those big trees seemed to listen to her like so many giants. And then, after about two weeks of that, Hanslaw stopped throwing stones. But he was there in the dark. She knew that, and I read the information in her face. I could see it, and I could hear it in her voice.

“Then one night, it was a fine moonlight night, the miracle happened. The Samarahan River looked like a belt of silver, and the snags stood up like black spikes that were holding it down in its bed. The girl was down near the bank singing softly to the tapang trees, and I crouched here in the shadow of the bungalow and wondered what would be the end of it all. I began to think that I was a fool to write that letter to the United States. I thought that it would have been better for me to have said nothing or to have written a letter saying that Hanslaw had got lost in making a trip into the interior.

“Presently she started to sing in a way that I had never heard before. It was more wonderful than I had ever heard her sing. And in that moonlight it had a witchery in it that was astounding. It was a magic melody. I crept down through the bushes till I could see her. She was standing right on the bank of the stream, and she was looking across the river to that strip of sand that you can see directly in front of the little landing.

“I followed the direction of her eyes, and then I

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saw. Yes, I saw Hanslaw. *Ja!* I had never seen him fully since the day he ran away. He was standing on the strip of bare sand, and he was looking straight across at her. He stood like a statue. His limbs were bare, and the only thing he had on him was the bark-cloth *chawat* that he had put on when he threw away his clothes.

“I laid down flat on my stomach and waited. There seemed to be nothing in the world but those two people. That is so. It was just a big empty globe in which a girl fought for the soul of a man against the jungle. That was how it seemed to me. It is only in a place like this that you could see a drama like that. There was the silver stream in which the dirty, scaly-backed crocodiles were sleeping, the madman on the other side, and the girl. And I was the only spectator of a play that was bigger than anything Shakespeare ever conceived.

“Hanslaw saw her. He could not help seeing her. She was right down on the bank, and the big moon lit up the place like the Unter den Linden on a festival night. For five minutes he stood motionless, and all that time she sang a soft old ballad that would tear the heart out of an image. That is so. She was singing for her own life as well as for his. I knew that. Her voice never had such melody in it as it had at that minute, and it will never have it again. I am sure it will not.

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“She stopped with a little choking trill, and Hanslaw moved restlessly. I clawed the ground to keep from springing on to my feet. Then that half-naked man moved around like a restless panther, his body half turned toward the trees as if he was inclined to spring into the dark depths.

“She started to sing again, and he was still till she had finished. Then his nervousness gripped him again. It seemed as if he was afraid of someone cutting off his retreat. It was terrible to watch. Her singing seemed to hold him while she sang, but the moment she finished he was ready to spring back into the trees at the slightest sound.

“The girl stopped exhausted, and he made a quick move for the shadows. He had crossed the sand when something happened. I do not know if she threw herself into the water or if the rotten bank gave way beneath her when she was leaning out. I think it was the latter. But before I could get on my feet she was being swept down the river!

“You know what this Samarahan River is? It is alive! In that dirty mud there are thousands of crocodiles. It is so. I got to my feet with the most awful feeling that I have ever felt, and, as I did so, a cry like the cry of a lost soul came from Hanslaw, and his long naked body shot out like a shaft into the silver stream where the girl was battling. That was a horrible cry that he gave. I can hear it now if

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I shut my eyes. I will always hear it. I will never forget it. Do you know what I am talking of? It was the cry of the soul coming back to the body it had left. And I heard it!

“He reached her in three strokes, and he swam toward this side of the shore. I prayed then. I did. I had not prayed for ten years, but I prayed quick as he was striking out for this bank. I knew then that God Almighty had done something in His own way, and that He had made me a witness of the miracle.

“She had fainted when he reached the bank, and I crouched in the shadow and watched him. Very gently he picked her up in his long, sinewy arms and carried her up to the bungalow, and I walked on air as I followed. I was stunned. I was incapable of doing anything. That is so.

“He carried her in the door and placed her on the couch that was just inside, and then she came to her senses and spoke to him. I listened in the dark outside. For a minute he did not answer, then he spoke as if the floodgates of his soul had been suddenly ripped away, and I crawled away down to the Dyak village. It was not for me to hear any more. I had heard enough. *Ja!* I had heard enough to tell me that she was as safe as if she was in her mother’s home in Baltimore. That was all I wanted to know.

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“In the morning I came back here. Hanslaw had on a clean drill suit of mine, and he had shaved himself with my razor. When I came to the door he caught my two hands and held them for three minutes without speaking. Then the girl came out from the other room and put an arm around his neck, and the other arm around mine. And the three of us cried. I am glad to think that I could cry at such a time.

“‘You are a good fellow, Hochdorf,’ said Hanslaw. ‘Ethel is taking me home.’

“And that girl put her arms around my neck and kissed me then, and that is the greatest reward I have ever got. I am sure it is. She was one of God Almighty’s angels, and Hanslaw and I were but two pieces of mud alongside her. That is all we were. She was the greatest woman I have ever known.”

“And now?” I asked, as the German stopped speaking.

“I got a letter from them yesterday,” he replied. “He is lecturing in one of the European capitals, and he is making good. He is a great naturalist, as I told you. But that woman — *Ach Gott!* Hanslaw was right about the flowers. They would not bud in spring if there were not women like her in this world. That is so.”

The Red Face of Feerish Ali

III

THE RED FACE OF FEERISH ALI

THIS is the first time I have put this story upon paper, but twice before I have related it briefly to two different persons. Once when I told it to the bumboat man at Berbera in return for a bowl of flour and sweetened water, he looked at the little statue of Mohammed in the corner of the room and winked slowly three times. The other person to whom I narrated the happening was a little wrinkled Hadesi, who sat by the roadside where the great pilgrim trail to Mecca winds like a white milk snake across the hills, and he walloped the sand with the flat of his sword when I had finished.

“And what answer did you give the woman when she asked you what are the greatest things in the world?” queried the little Hadesi.

“This was my answer,” said I:

Four things greater than all things are,
Women and horses and power and war.

“Wow, that was a great answer!” said the little Hadesi, and when I walked on across the hot sand that glittered like crushed diamonds, he was pound-

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ing the earth with his sword blade and chanting the song of Mahbub the Muleteer to the desert winds.

Now this is the story. Three hours after the old *Penlennon* dived into a thousand fathoms of water off the coast of Somaliland, seven hundred miles northeast of Mombasa, I struck a humpbacked patch of wet sand about half the size of the parade ground at Aden. The coast line showed up like a smudge of soot on a sky of brass, and I watched it as I rested. I knew that I would have to swim the stretch of oily water between the sand hummock and the shore before the tide rose.

I was on the sand bank about an hour when I sighted a fleet of feluccas, catamarans, and dahabeahs coming out from the mainland and making straight for the island, and I covered myself with a tangle of seaweed so that I could see everything without being seen. There were over thirty boats in the fleet, and they completely surrounded the little hummock. Then the biggest dahabeah drew out from the rest, and I watched a big, bearded man on the deck yelling instructions to the crew. The naked Arabs lowered a long, yellow box into the water, paddled the box to the sand bank, fixed it on the highest point, and then splashed back to the dahabeah. The moment they climbed aboard, the mixed fleet turned and raced for the mainland, leaving me alone with the mystery box.

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“Now it’s up to me to investigate,” I said, and I clawed myself out of the seaweed and went toward the big box. “Someone has died of the plague,” I muttered, as I stumbled toward it. “This is an isle of the dead by the look of things, and they bring the bodies out here for the current to carry them out to sea.”

The box was covered with a piece of coarse matting, and I pulled this aside and looked in. Staring up at me were a pair of topaz eyes that were deeper than the Guinea Basin, and those eyes belonged to a brown woman who was prettier than the houris that wait to open the pearl gates of the seventh heaven. The bumboat man at Berbera said that couldn’t be so, but the bumboat man was a fool. He didn’t see her.

“What is wrong?” I stammered, and when I put the question I thought that the odds were a million to one against her being able to understand it. But I got a surprise.

“The world is wrong,” she answered, and when I stood staring at her with my mouth open like a Shangalla beggar, she smiled like the sun on an Easter morning.

“And what is wrong with the world?” I asked stupidly.

“When you cut the thongs on my wrists and ankles I will tell you,” she answered.

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I cut the cords hurriedly, wondering as I did so what was at the bottom of the mystery. She chafed her limbs till she was able to stand upright, then she folded her silk sarong around her body and looked at me with her big topaz eyes.

“What are the greatest things in the world?” she asked.

It was then that I gave the answer which so impressed the little Hadesi. I had heard a sailor chanting the song in a Portuguese boarding house at Mombasa, and the words came to my lips as she asked the question. Said I:

Four things greater than all things are,
Women and horses and power and war.

“You are wrong,” she said.

“And what are greater?” I asked.

“Love and hate,” she answered; then she walked down to the water. “We had better make a start for the mainland,” she continued. “The tide is rising.”

I pushed the yellow box into the water without speaking, the woman slipped in behind me, and when she had got a grip with one hand we struck out for the shore. That was a mighty big swim, but at last we found ourselves high and dry on a stretch of pebbly beach that looked lonelier than the ruins of Karnak.

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The woman got her breath and turned toward me. "We're here," she said, "and now I'd like to know what you intend doing?"

"I'll sleep here tonight," I answered, "and tomorrow I'll strike south along the coast till I find a settlement. And you?" I asked.

She was staring at the sea when I put the question, but she turned suddenly and fired an interrogation at me.

"Did you ever hear of the Red Face of Feerish Ali?" she asked.

I laughed when she said that. It was a fool question when you put it to a man who has lived on the east coast of Africa. Every sailorman from the Crozets to Holy Cross Bay has heard of the Red Face, and she knew from my laugh that my ears had been open to the stories told about it at night on deck, and along shore.

"Would you like it?" she asked, carelessly.

Then I laughed again. It sounded just as foolish as if anyone had asked me if I would like the tail of Halley's Comet or the Ring of Saturn! My, yes. The Red Face of Feerish Ali had been a dream for thirteen hundred years. All the world trekkers that had ever cut the East into strips had heard of the thing. The Siahposh Kafirs know of it; the Basutos chant its power in their war songs; the Druses whisper of it, and the Zimoors sing of its beauty in

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the hills behind Fez. I had to laugh mighty hard at the cool way she asked me if I would like it.

"As you are in a generous mood," I said, "you might get me the mainsail of the *Flying Dutchman* and the—"

She turned on me and I stopped. Her topaz eyes flamed in a way that pushed my words back into my throat, and I just stared at her as if I were hypnotized.

"You fool!" she cried. "Do you think I am a liar? I asked you if you would like the Red Face of Feerish Ali, and I want an answer."

"Sure I'd like it," I stammered. "I'd give my soul for it."

There was a light in her eyes that made me think of a woman who had stabbed her husband at Kismayu, and it was that light that enabled me to get a grip on things. I remembered having heard that the men of the Gamant tribes have a habit of putting away their wives when a prettier woman swings up on the horizon, and I guessed that the sand hummock off the coast was a mighty good place to put a woman who was not wanted. You bet it was. And I guessed a bit farther than that. I came to the conclusion that the guy with the black beard on the big dahabeah was the husband of the lady with the topaz eyes, and then I got a hunch that she knew of the hiding place of the Red Face of Feerish Ali.

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Blackbeard was no ordinary Arab, and I thought that it was mighty unlucky for him if her ladyship had a bunch of his secrets up her sleeve.

A wide-faced moon swung up over the hills as we sat on the beach, and all of a sudden the woman started to sing the Song of the Red Face. I had heard bits of it before, but they were mighty small bits when I compared them to her chantey. My, yes! Hers was a song of songs. It seeped through my skin and intoxicated me. It brought back the past and sent the horsemen of Feerish Ali galloping down the pearly sky. I heard the Moslem warriors charge and watched the desert tribes scamper madly across the hot sands when the Face of Feerish spurred fire as he led his cavalry after them.

It was a song full of blood and fire, of charging hosts and thundering squadrons, of swinging axes and flashing swords, of whizzing spears and crashing shields. There was never such a song. And the wonder of wonders, I seemed to see everything that she was singing of. I saw Feerish sweep down through Habesh, the Arab name for Abyssinia, Feerish of the Red Face, the face that no one could look upon. Wow! the thing scared me. I listened with my nerves on a tension, and my throat got dry as she chanted stanza after stanza. That song had been polished by desert bards for thirteen hundred years. A thousand tongues had plaited into it the

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swit of the swinging blade, the groans of the dying, and the *kleeck* of the short ax on the shields of brass. Lordy! what a poem it was!

The woman finished at last with the death of Feerish at the Bahr-el-Azrek, which is the Blue River, and I gave a little gurgle of wonder. It was a terrible story. My heart was thumping madly with the thrill of the thing, and my ears were straining the silence that seemed to close in around us when she finished. There was never a song like that. All the sagas of the Vikings, the ballads of the Sikhs, and the chants of the Afghans were weak things compared to that. Skald or troubadour could never have written that. Time had made it with a million tongues and the white sunshine that makes the imagination bubble. And I knew as I sat there like a man in a dream that the woman with the topaz eyes had spoken the truth when she asked me if I would like the Red Face. I was sure of it.

She turned on me suddenly and looked into my face. “Of what are you thinking?” she asked.

“Of the power of hate,” I said. Then, after a pause, I said boldly: “What possessed the big fool to do it?”

I thought she was going to spring at me when I put the question, but she controlled herself with an effort. “He loved a Falasha woman from Mej Hana,” she said quietly, “and she was three times

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more beautiful than I. Lie down and sleep now, for tomorrow we go up into the mountains.”

But I couldn't sleep. I lay awake thinking of Feerish Ali and his hordes sweeping down from Arabia, and the Arabs flying before the Red Face that had become a legend. And the woman had offered it to me! Fate and Hate were leading me to a thing that had been hunted by all the iron-jawed adventurers that had ever spurred or sailed into the unknown.

The dawn came up out of the Indian Ocean in a great wave of flame, and the woman sprang to her feet. I don't think she slept much either.

“Come along,” she cried. “We have far to go today.”

The mountains looked like blue chiffon tacked on to the bottom of the wine-red sky as we turned toward them, and the woman struck out with the easy swing of the desert born. I followed without a murmur. I didn't wish to question her any further. All through the night that song had rioted through my blood like wine, and I was ready to follow her anywhere. I knew what love could do, and now I was being shown what hate could do. The woman with the topaz eyes was selling a secret that had been kept for thirteen hundred years.

All through the hot morning we tramped and tramped, climbing higher and higher over slaty

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ridges that stretched up and up till I got the impression they would end suddenly and give us a three-mile drop into the plains of Abyssinia. Wow, yes! Out of the clumps of cactus and thorn an occasional jackal peered at us, and once a batch of hyenas collected on a slope and laughed at us like a mob of lost souls. The place got on my nerves, but the woman walked on steadily, as if she saw nothing, only the picture of that woman from Mej Hana who had taken her place in the affections of the big man with the black beard. She had a look in her eyes that made me start to think out plans for getting rid of the Red Face after I got my grip on it. Every time I looked at her I had the sort of hunch about my luck that you get sometimes at a roulette table when you ask the croupier to raise the limit to the skies.

“Huh,” said I to myself. “Old Blackbeard was ten different kinds of a fool to let this lady know his secrets and then try to get rid of her in that slipshod way.”

Handfuls of the red dust on those hills were caught up by wandering puffs of air, and you'd swear they were crimson ghosts dancing across the wastes. They made my blood run cold. The place was dead. There were only the jackals and hyenas, vultures and lizards, and the wraiths that danced mad sarabands across the plains. I thought then

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that the woman had a purpose in singing me the Song of the Red Face. Every time my nerves got shaky as I looked around at the stripped horror of the place, I thought of the great chant and my muscles stiffened. Only for that song the devils that seemed to inhabit that place would have made me turn tail and rush for the coast at full speed. The ocean is a mighty clean affair when you compare it with bare hills that made you feel that something terrible would crawl over them at any minute.

We slept that night high up on the mountains, at least we tried to sleep. I lay awake all through the night listening to the peculiar noises made by the puffs of wind that hummed across the hills, and the howling of the jackals, and the rustling of lizards and crawling things. Besides, I was mighty hungry. We had nothing but bitter berries and brackish water from the time we had landed on the mainland, and berries are not satisfying to a man who is very hungry.

We started on across the stony slopes the moment it was daylight, and about midday we came to the great chasm in the hills. That was the deepest abyss I have ever seen. I suppose it is the deepest that anyone has ever seen. It looked as if the heat of the place had baked the crystalline rocks till they parted, and across the landscape there was a trench that was over a mile deep. My, what a cleft that

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was! The rays of the sun were like white lances as they dived into the depths thousands of feet below. The Grand Cañon of the Colorado, the quebrada of the Apurimac in the Andes, and the big fissures in the Himalayas near the Khaiber Pass are small affairs compared to that cleft in the crystalline rocks of Somaliland. It was a terrible chasm. It looks as if some giant had sliced the thing with a sword blade ten miles long when the earth was cooling. That's so. It took my breath. I panted like a winded buffalo when I stood and stared at the thing, and the dizzy depths loosened the muscles of my knees till I fell on the ground with terror.

"What is wrong?" asked the woman.

"I'm afraid," I gasped. "I'm afraid of that!"

I pointed at the infernal trough and she laughed at my fear. She picked up a rock and jerked it down into the thing, and I gave a yell as I watched the stone dropping through space for a mile. Gee, it was awful! There were no shelves or ledges like you see in the Grand Cañon. The sides of that devilish crevice were perpendicular, and I clutched at the tufts of desert grass and clawed myself back from the rim.

"Why," said the woman, "I thought you were willing to attempt anything to get the Red Face?"

"So I am," I stammered, "but that thing took my breath."

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She looked at me curiously, and I got to my feet and followed her as she coasted the edge of the thing. It was weird, terrible, awe-inspiring. The sunbeams, striking down into it, whitened the walls and made them that snaky and slippery that you felt inclined to scream out with terror every time you looked at them.

We walked for about half a mile along the edge, then the woman pushed her way through a clump of stunted thorn, and next minute we came out in front of a spidery bridge of coarse hemp that swung above the depths at a point where the huge gash was not more than thirty feet from side to side. Oh! that bridge gave me an awful sensation. It swayed backward and forward with the gusts of wind that blew up out of the abyss, and I clutched the thorn bushes lest the horrible fascination of the crevice would make me take a dive into the place.

The woman looked at me and smiled, then she walked forward to the end of the bridge. I felt seasick and worse. You bet I did. She was stepping on to that bit of flimsy ropework that swung over the chasm, and I yelled out to her as I glanced at the mile-deep drop beneath the cobweb of hemp. Imagination pictured her dropping through five thousand feet of air, and I got a feeling that made my head swell.

“Come back!” I yelled. “You’re mad!”

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“It’s perfectly safe,” she laughed. “I have been over here scores of times.”

The bridge swayed beneath her as she walked slowly across, and I laid down on the edge of the chasm and squirmed like a Tamil with the cholera as I watched her. I never felt any sensation like I suffered then. Not much!

She stopped when she had got halfway across and looked back at me. “Come along,” she said. “Follow me, there is no danger.”

“I can’t!” I screamed. “I can’t! My head would swim if I attempted to walk over that cobweb.”

“Not for the Red Face of Feerish Ali?” she asked.

“No,” I stammered.

She remained silent for a while, then she started to chant a part of that song that told of how Feerish rode alone at the head of his riders, and how the desert hordes fled because they thought that fire came from his face. She sang it standing upon the bridge, and while she sang I crawled toward the place where the hemp cables were tied to the rocks. I couldn’t resist that song.

I clutched the ropes and looked down at the depths that came up against me like a cold hand. The place set me trembling as if I had a fit of ague.

“Come on,” said the woman, softly. “You are

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only half a mile from it now. The Rocking Stone is on the opposite bank."

Now when she mentioned the Rocking Stone I was certain that she spoke the truth when she said that she knew the hiding place of the Face. Ras Allad, the blind Arab, who kept an opium joint in the place of The Nine Devils at Mombasa, had often sung to me of the Rocking Stone that hides the Red Face, and when she mentioned the stone I got down on my hands and knees and crawled out on the bridge. That song of hers made me drunk, and I wanted to get my hands on that thing if I lost my life in the attempt.

"Pass the guy ropes under your arms and shut your eyes," said the woman. "I will tell you if you move an inch from the center of the bridge."

I closed my eyes and started forward on that swinging, spidery arrangement that swung above the depths. The woman's voice came to me as I shuffled forward timorously. "Keep on," she said. "You're going all right. Come on. You are more than halfway across. A little to the right; to the right."

I stopped then and opened my eyes with fear, and my limbs were paralyzed by the dread that gripped me. I tried to turn around to make for the side I had left, but the woman rushed out on the swaying structure and gripped my arm. "No, no," she cried.

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"Don't go back! I cannot get it without help. You're nearly over. Come along!"

She gripped my arm and pulled me with a strength that surprised me, and as she pulled, she chanted the song. I gathered myself together and followed her, trying vainly to shut my eyes to the quivering heat waves that filled the chasm.

"Keep moving!" she cried. "You are nearly over. Now you are right." She gave me a final pull as I reached the other end of the bridge, and I staggered to a safe spot and collapsed.

"Now we are right," said the woman. "Come along, we will be there in no time."

We followed the edge of that terrific gash for about a mile, crushing our way through clumps of cactus and stunted brushwood. The woman was in the lead. She walked with tireless feet, and I followed close behind her, leaving bits of my clothing on every thorn bush that reached out to block the way. It was a devil of a track. Every bush seemed to be all spines and hooks, and I was just wondering if I would be flayed alive when I reached the place, when we turned an elbow of the cañon, and the woman stopped.

"This is the Rocking Stone," she said quietly, and I wiped the blood and perspiration out of my eyes and looked at the pillar of basalt that was immediately in front of me.

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The pillar was fully fifteen feet high and over ten feet in circumference, and it stood upright in a bowl of rock. It reminded me of a stunted fir tree in a shallow pot.

"It rocks backward and forward," said the woman. "Put your shoulder to it and push."

I put my shoulder to it and pushed gently, and the pillar started to rock in its socket of stone in a way that made me jump back from it.

"It won't fall," said the woman, laughing softly at my fear. "See, you must keep on pushing it till it swings as far as the socket will allow. Do you understand? Behind this pillar is the opening that leads to the passage where the Red Face lies hidden, and one can only get into that opening when the pillar swings to the farthest point that the bowl of rock will allow."

I understood then. I put my shoulder against the big basalt column and set it rocking violently, and as it swerved out of its upright position, it disclosed a round opening in the rocky wall immediately behind. This opening was only visible for a few seconds as the huge pillar swung away from it to either side, and as I thrust the thing forward when it swung back to me, I wondered how the woman would ever negotiate the entrance.

If she sprang and missed the hole in the wall she would be crushed as the stone rolled back.

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"Keep it going!" she cried. "Push harder. Harder!"

She wrapped her silk sarong tightly around her legs, and I looked at her with a question in my eyes as I kept the pillar moving.

"I am going to jump," she said quietly.

"You will be killed!" I cried. "You will be crushed between the pillar and the wall!" The perspiration streamed down my face as I looked at her.

"No, no," she cried. "Keep it going. If I get inside I will signal you when I am ready to come out."

I would have stopped the thing, but I was afraid that the woman would leap if she saw that I was slackening the speed of the terrible pendulum, so I put all my strength into the task and swung it backward and forward till I thought that it would leap out of its socket and thunder into the chasm. The whole width of the opening in the wall was disclosed now, and the woman gathered herself together like a puma waiting to spring.

"Keep it going!" she cried. "Faster! Faster! *Faster!*"

I flung my last ounce of strength into the task, and at that moment the woman sprang!

It was a wonderful leap. My, yes! I saw only a flash of blue silk, then the stone rolled back over the opening, and I knew that she was through. She had

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measured the distance, timed the movement of the murderous pendulum, and then hurled herself at the opening with wonderful swiftness. If she had missed it I would have been powerless to save her.

I flung myself down on the sand and watched the pillar as it slowed down. I figured that she would be in that place for a few minutes, and I endeavored to rest myself so that I would be able to set the pendulum swinging to its full extent when she was ready to make the return jump.

Ten minutes passed, twenty minutes, thirty. I began to think that something had happened, but just as my fears were becoming uncontrollable, there came a faint pounding from behind the pillar, and I again set the basalt pendulum in motion.

As the opening became visible, her voice came to me from the darkness of the passage in which she was waiting. "You will have to tell me when to jump," she cried; "I cannot see from here. Tell me when the pillar is swaying most, and then scream out when it passes the hole as it swings toward the chasm."

I set my teeth and pushed. The big boulder rocked and rolled, making a terrific grinding noise as it swished to and fro in its basin. Its swing became longer, and I watched it with bulging eyes. The woman's life was in my hands, and the strain was tremendous.

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"Get ready to jump!" I shouted.

"I am ready," she said.

The stone came toward me on its return swing, and I thrust it back with all my strength.

"Jump!" I screamed. "*Jump!*"

Out of the darkness of the opening she shot with the speed of a bullet, stumbled headlong into the sand, then picked herself up, and approached me. I was staggering blindly back from the pillar, but as she came toward me I caught a flash of something that nerved my weakened legs and set my heart pounding madly. Oh! yes! A million lances of red fire darted from the breast of the woman. Her bosom seemed to be on fire. The white blinding light of the bare hills was sucked up by something that she clasped in her arms, and was then flung back in spurts of red flame that made me cover my eyes. It blinded me. It took my senses away from me for a moment; then I looked again and saw. Bound across the woman's breast with a piece of the silk sarong was the Red Face of Feerish Ali!

I suppose that I was the first western man that had ever seen that affair. Thousands had hunted for it, but they had never found it. Desert tribes had kept the secret since the day when Feerish and his Moslems had been butchered at the Bahr-el-Azrek. It had figured through a hundred legends of the East, and had been sung of from Lourenço

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Marquez to Tabriz, and from the oases of the Igidi Desert to the brick walls of Tashkend. Falashas, Shangallas, Nubians, Agows, and Arabs had fled in terror before the thing that the woman clasped in her arms, and I had a queer feeling of dread as I stumbled forward and touched it.

It was a great mask of gold, with openings for the mouth, eyes, and nostrils, but in the center of the forehead was the real wonder of the affair. There was embedded a ruby greater than the biggest ruby the world has ever heard of. The ruby that Tamerlane wore in his crown and the one that Shah Jehan presented to his bride were small and insignificant jewels compared to the one in the Red Face. There was never a stone like that. Never! It was a living, blazing heart of blood that seemed to swell as one's blinded eyes watched the red fire stream out from it. It gripped my brain with a band of iron, and I flung myself on the ground beside it as the woman placed it on the sand.

"Is it worth the trouble?" she asked.

"Trouble?" I cried. "There was never anything like this. I would go to perdition for it!"

She laughed at my remark, and I cried over the mask as I ran my fingers over it. My, what a story that thing could have told of fight and slaughter! That big ruby eye had struck terror into the tribes that thought Feerish was a bloody-eyed Cyclops as

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he galloped down on them. The treasure fascinated me. It hit me in the emotional solar plexus, and I could do nothing but fondle it and weep over it.

The woman touched me on the shoulder and brought me out of the stupor into which I had fallen. She was looking nervously at a clump of low brushwood at the rear of the wall that ran behind the Rocking Stone, and when I sprang to my feet she pointed toward it.

“We are followed,” she whispered.

“How? Where?” I gasped.

She shaded her eyes with the palm of her hand, looked for a minute at the brushwood clump, then turned and gripped my arm.

“We must run!” she cried. “If we can reach the bridge across the chasm we can stop them from pursuing us farther.”

I seized the mask of Feerish Ali and rushed after her as she turned back toward the spidery structure we had crossed on our way. I didn't like being captured at that moment, and I cursed the spy in the brushwood as I ran madly behind her. I wanted to get away out of that cursed country and take the Red Face with me. In my mental eye I saw the savants of Europe and the United States blinking their eyes when I put before them an article that they were certain was never in existence. My! what a shock it would be!

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The heat waves danced above the big crevice, and the dust phantoms rose up and pursued us as we raced forward. Once I looked behind, and then I ran faster. I caught a glimpse of a man dodging from one clump of cactus to another, and I clutched the mask tighter as I gasped the news to the woman.

“Hurry!” I cried as I raced beside her. “Hurry! He is gaining on us!”

She staggered, and I grasped her arm and helped her forward. Her feet were bleeding from the rocks and stones, but she showed wonderful grit as she stumbled on. I had never seen a woman with one-half her courage.

We reached the infernal spider’s web across the abyss, and she led the way. I had to give her the Red Face to hold while I dropped on my knees and shuffled across with the guy ropes under my arms, and my eyes closed against the horrors of the depths, and all the time she screamed at me to go faster. When I staggered on to the far side, she pushed the mask into my hands and thrust me behind the thick bushes on the rim.

“Quick! Give me your knife!” she cried. “Hurry, he is coming!”

I gave her the knife, and she rushed back to the middle of the bridge and started to saw away at the little cross strands of hemp that were knotted to the two big rope cables that spanned the crevice.

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She didn't touch the cables. She only sawed at the hemp lacing that bound them to each other, so that a man running across would step on a place that she had sawed and go through into the abyss.

It turned me sick as I watched her, but when I looked at the mask at my feet I forgot the murderous work she was doing. God, yes! I wouldn't have cared if a thousand men had tumbled into that place as long as I got safely away with the Red Face. Life was a small matter compared to that treasure. You bet it was. I screamed to her to hack the cross strands cunningly so that our pursuer would not see, and I hugged the mask to my chest as she obeyed.

The woman slipped back and dropped down beside me in the sand. The silence was fearful. Our hearts were pounding mightily, and the *kleck kleck* of a sand lizard went out into the stillness like the blows of a sledge hammer.

“Who could it be?” I gasped.

“I don't know,” breathed the woman. “There are very few who know of the Rocking Stone. Hush! Here he comes!”

There was a rustle in the bushes on the other side of the gulch, then a man broke cover and made a wild dash for the bridge. I think the heat blinded the woman for an instant, so that she could not tell who it was, but it was only for an instant. She rose

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to her feet with a scream of agony, and as she screamed I saw the cross strands running from cable to cable break through beneath the weight of the black-bearded man who had skippered the dahabeah that had brought her to the sand bank!

He didn't go right through. His arms caught the cables that were untouched by the knife, and as I looked at him swinging there with five thousand feet of air beneath his kicking legs, I saw the woman dashing across the bridge toward him. My! what a woman she was! She had cut so many of those cross ropes that it was a mighty risky job for her to venture back to help him, but she went. My, yes! She went without thinking of her own danger. She only saw him swinging by his arms, and those legs that had a mile of space beneath them. Those legs turned me sick. I tried to turn my head away, but he fascinated me—his legs clawing for support. I dreamed of them for months after that day.

The woman reached the side of the man and put her muscular arms around his chest. Then she started to lift with every muscle in her body. It made the little Hadesi on the Mecca road cry when I told him of that happening. "What a great woman!" he said, and by the bones of Marco Polo she was great! That black devil had left her out on a sand bank two days before, and she was risking her life to save him.

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The bridge rocked and swayed as she lifted him slowly. I think she could have lifted him if he weighed a ton. I am sure she could. Up and up she lifted him till he got his knees upon the strong cables, and I got a cold chill when I saw that he was safe. I did some mighty quick reasoning at that moment. The woman's hate that had made her take the Red Face from its hiding place had turned to love when she saw that big brute slip through the bridge, and it didn't take me two minutes to see how I'd fare now that they had joined forces. You bet it didn't! I knew that Blackbeard was not an amiable customer because she had told me that it was a good job for my health that he did not catch a glimpse of me on the sand bank; so when I saw them crawling toward me, I got busy.

“This is where I do a fadeaway,” I muttered, and, gathering the Red Face of Feerish Ali in my arms, I dashed off full speed into the cactus and thorn clumps that fringed the abyss.

All through the afternoon I ran without stopping. A score of times I would have dropped from exhaustion, but each time I glanced at the big ruby in the forehead of the gold mask I ran faster. The sun sank into the West, shooting red lances at the ruby, which the ruby returned, and still I staggered on. Every bush seemed to shelter the Bearded Sheik and his wife, and I guess I was half insane

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with terror when the night fell, and a big moon climbed over the hilltops and looked at me.

I had no idea where I was. Sometimes I thought that I was running toward the ocean, and at other times I seemed to get a creepy feeling that told me that I was still close to the big chasm. I sensed the thing like a Hindu senses the nearness of a cobra. I staggered across a moon-washed slope, still clasping the Red Face to my bosom. I was out of the cactus and thorn for a moment, and I increased my speed. A mirage of the ocean came up before my eyes, and I moved my tired legs faster.

“If I could get to the coast and get up to Aden,” I muttered. “Up to Aden. Up to Aden.” I repeated the words over and over as I raced down the incline. “Up to Aden. Up to—”

I gave a mighty yell just then and threw myself on my face. It was the only way to save myself. I clawed with both hands at the little patches of desert grass, and, when I finally stopped sliding, I lay listening within twelve inches of the brink of the chasm, listening to the tinkle of something that was falling through the black depths that defied the moonbeams! And that something was the Red Face of Feerish Ali, which had slipped out of my hands when terror had made me fling myself face down and claw madly at every little tuft of grass to stop myself from being hurled over the rim!

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I lay for an hour or more, unable to move, then I crawled hurriedly into a shelter of brushwood. Voices came to me out of the silence of the night, and as I listened I saw the woman and the black-bearded man come over the rise. They walked slowly down toward the brink of the crevice, and it was mighty evident to me that they were hot upon my trail.

They reached the edge and stood for a moment talking quietly, then the man turned down the bank while the woman walked slowly toward the bushes where I was hiding. They had evidently agreed to beat the clumps along the edge in search of me.

I held my breath as she came nearer. She passed within a yard of me, then, as if she possessed the scent of a bloodhound, she circled around the clump, and came directly toward the spot where I was lying. I moved my leg lest she would trip over it, and the movement made my presence known to her. She stopped and leaned forward.

“You are there?” she said softly.

“Yes,” I answered.

“Where is the Face?” she asked.

“At the bottom of the abyss,” I answered; then, as she stood like a statue, I told her hurriedly of the happening.

When I had finished she stood for a few minutes without speaking; but a faint halloo, that came

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from the direction in which the man had gone, made her speak rapidly.

"I believe you," she said. "There is a curse on the thing. But the Black Sheik would kill you if he found you. Stay where you are till morning, and then make your way down the coast to Obbia. Good-by."

"Good-by," I answered, and then I watched her hurry along the rim of the chasm to meet her lord.

Next day I found my way to the coast, and five days afterward I reached Obbia, and that is the story. The bumboat man said that it would try the belief of an Englishman, and an Englishman will believe anything the moment you get him out of the English Channel; but the little wrinkled Hadesi said it was a good yarn.

I am sorry that I had no copy of that song of the Red Face to give to the Hadesi.

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IV

A JUNGLE GRADUATE

THE moonlight fell upon Schreiber's bald head as he jerked his body out of the depths of the rough-hewn lounge chair. His eyes were turned to the blue-black smear of jungle, but his ears were absorbing the faint sounds that came from the interior of the bungalow. The path, like a white-washed strip, reached fearfully toward the weird tree masses, and alongside it the coarse rirro grass stood up haughtily as if protesting against the man-made barrenness. The jungle resents a cleared space; it speaks of the presence of human beings.

"What is it?" I asked softly.

"Nothing," murmured the naturalist, but his grip on the unplanned pine limbs which formed the frame upon which the Dyak mat was stretched did not relax. He gave one the impression of a man sifting the noises of the night with his whole body.

Suddenly his head came sharply down between his shoulders, and the chair groaned a protest as he left it with a spring. A black line appeared upon the moon-whitened path, and the heavy German pounced upon it with the agility of a cat.

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"It is that damn vermilion snake," he grunted, holding the wriggling thing up by the tail as he shuffled toward the door. "This is the second time he has escaped."

When the chair had again received him with a long-drawn creaking sound, I put a question.

"Did you see him before he started across the path?" I asked.

"No," snapped Schreiber. "I just felt that things are not right. That is easy. When he escaped it caused a little silence and just a little change in the note of those that didn't keep altogether quiet. Listen, please, now."

From inside the darkened bungalow came a peculiar wasp-like buzzing that filtered unceasing into the mysterious night. The surrounding jungle appeared to be listening to it. At first it defied the attempts of the ear when it sought to analyze the medley, then the different noises asserted themselves slowly. It was the inarticulate cry of the German's prisoners. There was the soft moaning of the wakeful gibbon, the *pat pat* of the civet, the whimper of the black monkey, the snuffing of caged small things, and the rustle of snakes that crawled wearily around their boxes. The sounds seemed to bring to the place a peculiar aura that put the bungalow apart from the untrammelled jungle that surrounded it on all sides.

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"They are all right now," murmured the German, contentedly. "They are quiet, so."

"But how did they know that the vermilion snake had escaped?" I asked. "They're in the dark, and the snake made no noise."

The naturalist laughed, the pleasant laugh of the man to whom a question like mine brings the thrill of subtle flattery.

"How?" he repeated. "My friend, the gibbon in there felt it in his blood, *ja*. He whimper softly, oh, so softly, and the news ran along the cages. The dark makes no difference to the wild people. Every little bit of their bodies is an eye. Every little hair listens and tells them something. That is as it should be. I felt the change in their notes. I was dreaming of Jan Wyck's place in Amsterdam just then, and I wake up mighty quick. The black monkey stopped quiet, for the black monkey is wise, but the tune of the others changed to pianissimo very, very sudden. A snake is a fellow that can get in anywhere. Listen to them now. I did not tell them that he was back, but they know."

A feeling of nausea crept over me as the German spoke haltingly, groping for the words to express himself. To me the bungalow appeared as a leprous spot in the jungle of wild, waving tapang, pandanus, and sandalwood, laced together with riotous creepers. The whimpering, snuffling,

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and protesting rustling made me shiver, and I surprised myself by voicing my thoughts.

“It seems so infernally cruel,” I stammered. “If you look at—”

The naturalist interrupted me with a quiet laugh, and I remained silent. The big meerschaum was being puffed vigorously.

“It is not cruel,” he said slowly. “Out there,” he waved a hand at the blue-black smear of jungle that looked like a foundation upon which the pearly sky reared itself, “they are dining on each other. My prisoners are safe and have plenty. Did you not hear just now how it troubled them when the snake escaped? So! The black monkey has a little one and she was afraid. The jungle life is not a lengthy one for the weak. I was at Amsterdam five years ago—*Ach Gott!* it seems fifty years ago—and at Hagenbeck’s I see a one-eared *mias* that I trapped years ago. She looked well. Would she be alive here? I do not know.”

The irritating droning noise continued to pour out of the bungalow. It floated out into the night that appeared to be all ears in an effort to absorb it.

“No, captivity is not bad if they are treated right,” continued the naturalist, “and can you tell me where they are not treated well?”

I didn’t answer. Confronted with a request for reasons to back up my stammered protest, I found

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myself without any. Schreiber's captives were well fed. The baby monkey was guarded from the snake.

The big German smoked silently for several minutes, his eyes fixed on the jungle belt in front.

"The zoological people treat their animals better than society treats human beings," he said, gently. "And the naturalists? Well, they treat them well. I never knew one who did not."

He stopped for a moment, and then gave a little throaty gurgle. Memory had pushed forward something that displeased him.

"I made a mistake," he remarked, harshly. "I did know of one. The night is young, I will tell you of him. It happened a long while ago when I first came to the Samarahan River — Fogelberg and I came together. This man's name was Lesohn — Pierre Lesohn — and he was a naturalist of a kind. That is, his heart was not in his work. *Nein!* He was always thinking of other ways of making money and no man who calls himself a naturalist can do that. This business calls for everything — heart, soul, brain, all. That is why I said Lesohn was not a naturalist. The devil of discontent was gnawing at him, and in this work there should be no discontent. No, my friend.

"One day I pulled down the river to Lesohn's place, and he pushed at me an illustrated paper from

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Paris. He laughed, too, very excitedly. He was nearly always excited; the discontented people always are.

“‘What do you think of that?’ he said.

“‘I read the piece in the paper, and I looked at the picture that went with it. It was the picture of an orang-outang, and it had under it the brute’s name. He had two names, just like you and me. There he was sitting at a desk smoking a cigar and making a bluff that he was writing a letter. It turned me sick. It was not good to me. I handed the paper back to Lesohn and I said nothing.

“‘Well?’ he snapped, ‘I asked you what you thought of it.’

“‘Not much,’ I said. ‘It interests me not.’

“‘You old fool!’ he cried out. ‘That monkey is earning two hundred pounds a week at the Royal Music Hall in Piccadilly. He is making a fortune for his trainer.’

“‘I do not care,’ I said, ‘I am not concerned one little bit.’

“‘Ho, ho!’ he sneered. ‘You want to work in this stinking jungle till you die, eh? I have other things in my mind, Schreiber.’ I knew he had, but I didn’t interrupt him just then. ‘Yes,’ he cried out, ‘I do not want to be buried out here with the wahwahs singing the “Dead March” over my grave. I want to die in Paris. And I want to have some

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fun before I die, Schreiber. There is a little girl whose father keeps the Café des Primroses—*Mon Dieu!* Why did I come to this wilderness?’

“‘And how will that help you?’ I asked, pointing to the paper that had the picture of the smart monkey in it.

“‘How?’ he screamed. ‘How? Why, you old stupid, I, Pierre Lesohn, will train an orang-outang too.’

“‘It is not good to make a brute into a human,’ I said. ‘I would not try if I were you.’

“Lesohn laughed himself nearly into convulsions when I said that. It was a great joke to him. He fell on the bed and laughed for ten minutes without undoing his face. He was a smart man, was Pierre Lesohn—too smart to come out of Paris. The smart men should always stay in the cities. The jungle is not for them. It agrees only with men who have made a proper assay of their faculties. Lesohn never had time to make an assay. He was too busy scheming.”

Schreiber stopped and again leaned forward in the big chair. Something had gone astray in the buzzing noise from the prison house, and like a maestro he listened for the jarring note. Softly he rose from his seat and slipped into the interior darkness.

When he returned he relit his pipe slowly—the jungle life makes a man’s movements composed and

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deliberate — then he settled himself back in the seat of his own manufacture.

“The little one of the black monkey is ill,” he explained. “If it was in the jungle it would die. Here it will live, I think. But we will get back to Lesohn, the smart Frenchman who should have stayed in Paris. He pasted that picture of the manape over his cot, and he looked at it every day. It got between him and his sleep.

“‘Two hundred pounds a week,’ he would cry out. ‘Think of that, you old, squareheaded Dutchman. That is nearly five thousand francs! That is four thousand marks! Could we not train one too?’

“‘Not me,’ I said. ‘I like the orang-outang just as he is. He suits me like that. If he got so clever that he could smoke my cigars and read my letters I would not like him one bit. He would be out of the place that God gave him in the animal kingdom.’

“I annoyed Lesohn by telling him that. I annoyed him very much. Three days afterward a Dyak trapped an orang-outang that was just getting out of its babyhood, and the Frenchman bought it quick.

“‘It is just the size I want,’ he said to Fogelberg and me. ‘I want to train it as quick as I can. Ho, ho! you two fools, just wait. There is a little girl whose father keeps the Café des Primroses — wait,

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Dutchman, and see things. Professor Pierre Lesohn and his wonderful trained orang-outang! Five thousand francs a week! Is it not good?’

“But Fogelberg and I said nothing. We knew the status of the orang-outang in the animal kingdom, and we were content to leave him on his proper plane. Mother Nature fixes the grades, and she knows that the orang is not the fellow that shall send notes to his sweetheart or puff cigars when he is sitting in tight boots that squeeze his toes that have been made for swinging him through the palm trees. From the ant-eating manis with his horn armor, right up to Pierre Lesohn, Mother Nature has settled things very properly and very quietly.

“Lesohn was not the man for the wilderness. No, my friend. He was all bubble, all nerves, and he wanted to feed on excitement ten times a day. And there is no excitement here. Not a bit. People in the cities think that there is, but they are mistaken. This is a cradle where you get a rest if you sit quiet. Do you understand? The Frenchman could not sit quiet. His imagination made him a millionaire after he had that orang-outang two days. It did so. It bought him a house at Passy, and a carriage and pair, and the smiles of the ballet-girls at the Grand Casino. Some men are like that. They make their imaginations into gas-wagons and ride to the devil. And Lesohn was

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taking something that didn't improve things. He kept a square bottle under his cot, and he toasted the monkey and the good times that he was going to have in Paris—toasted them much too often for my liking.

“That monkey learned things mighty fast. He was a great mimic, a very great mimic. Every time Fogelberg and I pulled down to Lesohn's place, the Frenchman trotted the damn hairy brute out to do things for our approval. Fogelberg didn't like it. I didn't like it. *Nein!* We told Lesohn and he laughed and made fun of us.

“‘Oh, you two old Dutchmen!’ he cried out. ‘Oh, you two old monkey-snarers! You wait! Professor Pierre Lesohn and his trained orang-outang at five thousand francs a week! Five thousand francs! Think of it! In the Café des Primroses I will think sometimes of you two fools on the stinking mud banks of the Samarahan.’

“He was going mad thinking of the good times he would have on the boulevards. He drank—*Gott in Himmel!* how he drank. He saw himself strutting in Europe with the monkey bringing in the money. He was mad, all right. And I think that orang-outang began to think that he was mad. He would sit alongside Lesohn and puzzle his old head to know what the Frenchman was so excited about. The brute didn't know of the dreams of Monsieur

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Pierre Lesohn. No, my friend. He didn't know that the Frenchman was going to make a pedestal of his wisdom upon which he could climb and kiss his fingers to the Milky Way. Oh, no! He was only an orang-outang and he didn't know that people would pay four thousand marks a week to see him stick his blue nose into a stein and puff at a cigarette. *Ach!* it sickens me.

"Then one day the monkey got sulky and would not do a single thing. I think Lesohn was drunk that day. He must have been. The brute was sulky and the Frenchman was drunk. Pierre told me of it afterward. The *mias* knocked over the specimen cases and went cranky. Lesohn went cranky, too. He saw the boulevards and the house at Passy and the ballet-girls and the Café des Primroses floating away on the monkey's tantrums, and he got sick. He got very sick. He swigged away at the flat bottle till he went nearly mad, and then he done something."

The bluey depths of the jungle appeared to pulsate as Schreiber halted in his story to listen again to the sounds that came from within. There was witchery in the soft night. It touched one with mysterious fingers. It watched outside the lonely bungalow, wondering, inquisitive, wide-eyed.

"He must have been mad," continued the German, "mad or very drunk. The Samarahan flowed

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right by Lesohn's bungalow, and the Samarahan was alive at that place. Dirty, ugly, scaly-backed crocodiles slept in the mud there all day long. Ugh! I hate crocodiles. They turn me sick. The Frenchman he was mad, though—mad with drink and mad because he thought the orang-outang was turning stupid."

"Well?" I gasped, "what happened?" The night was listening to the story. The buzzing noise from the prisoners died down to the faintest murmur.

"Well," repeated the naturalist, "Pierre Lesohn taught that orang-outang a lesson in obedience. He tied the animal to the trunk of a tree near the mud banks—yes, near the stinking, slimy mud banks that smell like assafoetida and then he, Pierre, laid himself down on the veranda of his bungalow with his Winchester rifle in his lap.

"The orang-outang whimpered, and Lesohn laughed. He told me of this afterward. The orang whimpered again and again. Then he cried out with fear. A bit of the mud started to move, and the big *mias* was afraid, very much afraid. You know the cold eye of the crocodile? It is the icicle eye. It is the eye of the monte sharp. No animal has such a cold eye. The shark? *Nein!* The shark has a fighting eye. The crocodile doesn't fight. He waits till all the cards are his way. He is a devil.

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That tied-up pet of Lesohn's attracted the dirty brute in the mud, and the orang-outang had been fool enough to tell him by that whimper that he was helpless. See?

"The crocodile watched him for one hour — for two hours — for three hours. He thought it might be a trap. Lesohn watched, too. He was teaching the monkey what mighty smart fellows come out of Paris.

"The crocodile knocked the mud off his back to get a better view, and the orang screamed out to Pierre to save him. He screamed mighty hard. He chattered of the things he would learn if Lesohn came to his aid quick, but Lesohn smiled to himself and sat quiet.

"The crocodile dug himself out of the mud and looked at the *mias*, and the *mias* shivered in every bit of his body. Lesohn told me all about it afterward. He said the monkey cursed him when the crocodile flicked the water out of his eye and moved a little farther up the bank. That icicle eye had the orang-outang fascinated. He lost his nerve. He shrieked and he prayed in monkey gibberish, and that gave the crocodile plenty heart. *Ach* yes! He thought that he held four aces in the little game with the orang, and he thinks it good to take a chance. He made a big rush at the tree, but Pierre was waiting for that rush. He threw the rifle for-

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ward quick, the bullet took the brute in the eye, and he flopped back into the stinking mud with a grunt of disgust.

“You see what Lesohn was? He was a madman. Next day when Fogelberg and I went down there he told us all about it, and he laughed a lot. The orang-outang was so mighty afraid that Lesohn would repeat the stunt that he was hopping round doing everything that he could. *Gott!* he was much afraid, was that monkey. I bet he dreamed of nights of that icicle eye of that crocodile. Every time Lesohn looked at him he shivered as if he was going to take a fit, and he whimpered like a baby. That crocodile had watched him for three hours. See?

“‘Look at him!’ screamed the Frenchman. ‘No more sulks from him! I tamed him! Here!’ he yelled to the orang, ‘bring me my bottle!’

“Didn’t that monkey rush to get it? You bet he did. He went as if it was a matter of life and death to him, and I suppose it was, to his thinking. And Lesohn shrieked with laughter till you could hear him at Brunei. He reckoned that the cold eye of a crocodile was the very best thing in the world to bring a monkey to his senses.

“‘I will take him over to Singapore next week,’ said Lesohn, ‘and from there I will get a boat to Colombo, and then ship by the Messageries Mari-

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time to Paris. Five thousand francs a week, Dutchman! You will read of me. *Mon Dieu!* Yes! You will read of Pierre Lesohn — Professor Pierre Lesohn and his trained orang-outang.’”

Schreiber halted in his recital. A wind came out of the China Sea, charged down upon the jungle and slashed the fronds of the big palms like a regiment of cuirassiers thundering through space. It died away suddenly, leaving an atmosphere of weird expectancy that put one's nerves on a tension. The night seemed to listen for something that it knew was coming.

“Go on!” I cried, excitedly. “Tell me! Tell me what happened!”

“Four days after that night,” said Schreiber, quietly, “I pulled down the Samarahan. When I came in front of Lesohn's bungalow I called out to him, but I got no answer. ‘He is in the forest,’ I said to myself; ‘I will go up to the hut and get a drink.’ It was a mighty hot day, and the Samarahan is not a summer resort. *Nein!* It is not.

“Did you ever feel that a silence can be too much a silence? Sometimes in the jungle I feel a hush that is not nice. It was here tonight when the vermilion snake escaped. Often in the forest it chokes the whistle of the cicada and it seems to stop the little blades of grass from waving. *Jah!* It is strange. Whenever I feel that silence I am careful.

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I am not afraid, but I know that other things that can feel in a way that I cannot feel are much afraid.

“It was that kind of a silence that I feel when I was going up the path to Lesohn’s bungalow. It was like ice upon my spine. It came around me and touched me like ten thousand cold hands. I am not imaginative, no, but in the jungle one gets a skin that feels and sees and hears. And my skin was working overtime just then. It was telling my brain something that my brain could not understand.

“I walked on my toes through the mangrove bushes at the top of that path. I know not why, but I did. I was near to making a discovery. I knew that. I stopped and peeped through the branches and I saw something. *Gott!* Yes! I saw something that made me reach out for the news that my skin was trying to tell me. I knew, and I did not know. Do you understand? I chased that thing all around in my brain and I was getting closer to it each minute. The things I thought of made it come closer, and my lips got dry. I thought of what Lesohn had done to that orang, how he had tied him to the tree and frightened him into a fit with the cold stare of that scaly-backed crocodile, and while I thought of that I watched the veranda of the bungalow. I seemed to see that monkey tied to the tree and that icicle eye looking at him from the mud, and then — why, I knew! It came on me

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like a flash. I felt as if I was hit with a sandbag.

“For three minutes I could not move, then I staggered toward the veranda. Do you know what was there? *That big ugly brute of a mias was fumbling with the Frenchman’s rifle, and he was crying like a human.*

“‘Where is Lesohn?’ I cried out. ‘Where is he?’ And then I laughed like a madman at my own question. My skin, that was all eyes and ears, had told me where Lesohn was. *Jah!* It was so.

“The big *mias* sprang up on his feet and he looked at me just as if he understood every word I said. My legs were as weak as two blades of grass. I had not seen the thing done. *Ach!* It was strange. I thought I had dreamed about it, but then I knew I hadn’t. It was the silence, and the crying *mias*, and something inside me which told me it is not good to teach a brute too much. ‘Where is he?’ I cried out again. ‘Show me where he is?’

“The orang wiped the tears from his ugly blue nose and touched me with his big, hairy arm, and then he started to shamble toward the mud banks where the Frenchman had tied him to give him that little lesson in obedience.

“I was sick then. That atmosphere turned me all upside down. I knew what had happened. Yes, I knew. My mind had pieced things together like the pieces of a picture puzzle. I knew what Lesohn

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had done to the brute, I knew the imitative ways of the *mias*, and I knew that Pierre was often drunk — very often drunk. And then there was the knowledge which my skin had strained out of the silence. A cold sweat ran from me as I followed the orang, and I clutched the rifle tight as I got near the mud bank and looked around for something to confirm the horror that my soul had sensed. And the proof was there. It was a coat sleeve tied to the tree where the Frenchman had tied the *mias* a week before, and the sleeve wasn't empty. *Nein!* The cords had been tied around the wrist of Pierre Lesohn, and the cords were very strong. They had stood the strain of the pull, and — and it was there as a proof of what had happened.

“It was all so plain to me. Lesohn must have been drunk, see? Well, while he was drunk it had come into the ugly head of that brute to let Pierre get a thrill from the icicle eyes of the scaly-backed devils in the mud. He had tied Lesohn to the tree, and then he got the rifle and copied the Frenchman by sitting on the veranda to watch for the first one of those things that would find out that Pierre was helpless. It was plain — oh, so plain to me. But the Frenchman, in educating that orang, had forgotten to teach him how to load a rifle. It was unfortunate, was it not? The rifle was empty, and when the dirty brutes came out of the mud, the

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mias could do nothing. *Gott!* no! He just fumbled with the breech and cried like a human being till I came along, and then it was too late."

"What did you do then?" I cried, as the German's heavy bass tones were pursued and throttled by the palpitating silence.

"I did nothing," said Schreiber, quietly. "Lesohn had told me what he had done to that brute. Fate — Nemesis — call it what you will — has funny ways. I looked at the orang-outang, and he backed away from me, crying. And he looked back a dozen times, still crying, till the jungle swallowed him up. Somewhere out there" — the German waved a hand at the dark forest that was watching and listening — "there is an orang-outang with a tragedy on his mind."

*The Phantom Ship of Dirk
Van Tromp*

V

THE PHANTOM SHIP OF DIRK VAN TROMP

THE tropic sun, looking like a flaming truck-wheel, lurched behind the blue smear of jungle that marked the horizon, and the heat-smitten trees waved their tops languidly, as if congratulating each other on the fact that the blazing afternoon had come to an end. A soft purring note came from the underbrush where the panting birds felt the first breath of cool air from the ocean. The purple haze of the dusk filmed the landscape, softening the outline of the distant hills that the rays of the westering sun had made wonderfully distinct.

Ford, the tall American, lifted himself upon one elbow and looked across the clearing. He called Hochdorf, the naturalist, by name, and, receiving no answer, sprang from the hammock and ran to the end of the veranda that extended the full length of the lonely bungalow. Here he stopped with a grunt of astonishment and gazed toward a clump of mohor trees to the right of the little dwelling. Hochdorf was kneeling in front of the clump, his rifle pointed at the shadows beneath the great trunks, and Ford

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watched him intently. Three times the German naturalist removed the rifle from his shoulder, and three times whipped it sharply back into place. The American was puzzled. He could see nothing, and he muttered to himself as he watched the kneeling marksman.

“It must be a wild boar,” he breathed. “There’s nothing — Gee! did you get it Hochdorf?”

Ford had sprung from the veranda as the German fired, and the curiosity with which he had viewed the actions of the naturalist was increased a thousand times as he raced across the clearing. Hochdorf had dropped the rifle on the grass the moment he had fired, and when the American reached his side he was mopping the perspiration from his forehead with a large bandanna. He was pale and sick looking, and his deep-sunken blue eyes were fixed on the spot he had fired at.

“What is it?” cried Ford. “What did you shoot at?”

The German pointed at the underbrush with a shaking forefinger. “See, did I—I get him?” he cried. “Do not show him to me! I cannot look at such a thing!”

Wondering much, Ford approached the bushes, kicked them aside with the point of his shoe and disclosed a huge black rat, vainly attempting to drag its mutilated carcass to safety.

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"Why, it's a rat!" he cried. "A rat as big as a prairie dog!"

"*Ja*, I know!" gasped the German. "Do not bring it out! *Himmel!* no! I cannot look at a rat without being sick. I am sick as the devil now!"

Ford dispatched the injured rodent and followed the big naturalist to the veranda of the bungalow. Hochdorf called for a glass of gin, and when the Dyak boy had brought a stiff nobbler, he drained it hastily and sank back in the big desk chair as if exhausted by the happening. For a few minutes he did not speak, then he turned to the wondering American.

"A rat is the only living thing that I cannot handle," he said slowly. "I would sooner handle a king cobra or one of those little poisonous kraits that can put you in Charon's ferryboat inside three hours. I have been made sick by that rat. *Ach!* yes! Did I ever tell you of the Phantom Ship of Dirk Van Tromp? *Nein?* Well, it is hot indoors, and if you like I will tell it to you now. There is a countryman of yours in that story, and it might interest you."

Ford pulled his chair closer, and the German continued.

"He was a fine fellow was that American. His name was Delnard, and I owe him my life. He thinks I have paid him back, but I am not sure.

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“Delnard and I were going from Trengganu to Pathia, and we had a passage on the *Lost Peri*, a schooner owned by a Singapore pearl buyer. The mate of that schooner was as much like me as one mangosteen is like another, and that was unlucky. It was mighty unlucky. The Malay boatswain had a grudge against the mate, and one evening when I was looking over the rail something fell on the back of my head, and before my knees had time to sag I was lifted up and tipped overboard. Before I lost my senses I had come to the conclusion that it was the mast that had fallen on my head. I did so!

“When I got my wits back I found that the schooner had waddled off into the night, leaving me and the man who had rescued me to look after ourselves. And I knew that it was Delnard, the American, who had rescued me. Fill up your glass and we will drink to him. By the bones of St. Philip of Neri, he was a brave man!

“After awhile we struck a fringe of mangrove trees, and Delnard hauled me ashore.

“‘How are you?’ he asked.

“‘My head aches,’ I said. ‘Did the mast fall on me?’

“Delnard laughed when I asked that question. ‘That Malay boatswain thought that you were the mate,’ he said. ‘He walloped you on the head with a jack-block and hoisted you overboard.’

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"I started to thank Delnard, but he clapped his hand over my mouth, and I was quiet. I was mighty quiet.

"'There is someone talking on the other side of this clump of trees,' he whispered. 'Don't make a noise till we see who it is.'

"That American started to climb through the slimy trunks of the mangrove trees, and I followed him. For about ten yards we crawled on our hands and knees, then we peered out through the branches. The moon was full and immediately in front of us was a patch of white sand that glittered like diamond dust.

"It was then that we saw the Green-eyed Woman and the monk. I shall always call her the Green-eyed Woman, *Ja*. I will! As we peered through the bushes her face was turned toward us, and her eyes shone like the two emeralds in the face of the cat-eyed goddess, Pasht, that they worshiped at Bubastis thousands of years ago. *Himmel!* they were wonderful eyes! When I saw them shining like that I thought of the stories that the Shans tell of the Queen of the Leopards who takes the shape of a beautiful woman so that she can torture the men who hunt the leopard folk. For that woman was beautiful. She looked like a naiad taking a rest on that strip of white sand, and Delnard and I stared with all our eyes.

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“She wore the most wondrous sarong that we had ever seen. It was the most wonderful sarong that ever was made. It was purple — the peculiar wicked purple that they can make at Srinager and Saharanpur, and it suited that woman. She was wicked-looking. She was so. She was lithe and tigerish, and those green eyes and that mane of gold that fell down over her breasts, made her look unreal. Many a day have I wondered how she came by those green eyes and that golden hair. I have seen nearly every breed of woman between Blair Harbor and Okhotsk, but I have never seen one like her. Never!

“‘Look at the man,’ whispered Delnard. ‘Look at him!’

“I tore my eyes away from the woman and looked at her companion. He was a monk, a long, lean, bare-poll'd monk, wrapped in a yellow robe, and he stood in the center of that sand patch with one arm stuck out like the statue of Friedrich Wilhelm in the Königstrasse. And he was talking. It was his voice that we heard when we were on the other side of the mangrove clump, but we could not hear him speaking when we were looking at the Green-eyed Woman. Her beauty had made us deaf to noises. It had so.

“But when we had wrenched our eyes away from the purple sarong and the curtain of golden hair, our ears got a chance to listen to what the monk was

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saying. He had some leaves of the talipot palm in his hand, and he was reading that woman a story. He was reading her a story, my friend, a story that was more wonderful than any that Scherezade told to the sultan. He would read a little and then he would explain it to her, and we listened to that story with every fiber of our beings. We could follow him in what he said, and we listened like two hill tigers waiting for the deer to come down to the watering place.

“Have you ever heard anything of the Phantom Ship? *Ja*, you have heard a little; I know. You have heard the stories that the old maids tell on the veranda of the Minto Mansions Hotel at Rangoon. I heard those stories when I first came to the East. They will tell you of the phantom ship that beats up and down the China Sea from Pulo Tiuman to Koh Pennan, but that bare-poll'd monk knew more than those old women. He knew why that ship was kept in the South China Sea. Ay, he did so. He knew the history of the whole business, and he was telling it to the Green-eyed Woman when Delnard and I found them on the sand patch. My friend, there are things happening in the Orient today that are just as wonderful as the things that took place in the reigns of Omar and Osman and the gay old Haroun.

“That was a wonderful story that we heard.

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Dirk Van Tromp, a big-nosed Dutchman from Amsterdam, rocked round the Cape of Good Hope in his old high-pooped ship and came up to the China Sea with his nose sniffing the south wind to get the scent of gold. That was a few days ago. It was before Buxar, and before Plassey. The Dutch were great rovers in those days, and Dirk Van Tromp and his bunch were the toughest that ever crept out of the fogs of the Zuyder Zee.

“That Dutchman had a nose for gold that was sharper than the snout of a Colombo Chetty. He could smell a piece of treasure a hundred leagues away, and once he got a whiff of the yellow metal he would circle round like a vulture swinging over carrion till he got his big hands on the stuff.

“Van Tromp heard that there was much treasure in an old gray monastery that was tucked away in the hills above Tahkechi, and he swore an oath on his big flat blade that the treasure would be his in a mighty short time. He was a determined gentleman was Mynheer Van Tromp. Delnard and I lay in the shadow of those mangrove trees, and we listened to the bare-pollled monk telling the Green-eyed Woman how the Dutchman went backward and forward in his old high-pooped ship trying to think out a plan to get at that hoard. And the monks in that monastery knew that the big-nosed pirate was waiting to get a chance at the gold and

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jewels in the vaults. You bet they did. They looked out from their towers and saw that Dutch ship go up and down like a big white-winged bird of prey, and they didn't say any prayers for Mynheer Van Tromp. Not any prayers that would do him good.

“Now the keeper of the keys of the treasure vault was a young monk who had never seen a woman. Never! Mind you, this is the story that the bare-pollled monk read from the leaves of the talipot palm. He told her that the treasure keeper had been found in a paddy-field by the monks of the monastery when he was a little baby, and they had reared him inside the walls till he grew up and became one of them. He had never seen a woman at a distance even. That place was quite some distance from a village, and that youngster was not allowed to stray. But the monks liked him, and when he grew up they gave him the keys of the vault and made him the guardian of all the wealth that was stored there from the time of Tamerlane.

“For three months that thieving Dutchman rolled up and down the coast, and the monks stayed inside their walls and waited. The head priest gave an order that the big gate should not be opened while Van Tromp was on the coast, and, to make matters more secure, he asked that young monk to stay in his cell and keep the keys with him. They were afraid

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of the Dutchman, and they had good reason to be. He was a fiend. He waited for an idea to get into his big, round head, and at the end of three months that idea came. And it was a devil of an idea. *Ja*, it was.

"Can you guess what that Dutchman did? He went down to Sebah, and he got a temple dancing girl who was as beautiful as the singing houris in the seventh heaven. She was more beautiful than Mura, whose loveliness killed the seven Nubians who dared to look upon her. She had eyes that she stole from Helen of Troy, and hair that was of the bronze tint that you see on the wing of the bird of paradise. That was what the monk told the Green-eyed Woman. Her little feet were so small that the children's slippers in the bazaar fell from them, and her hands were like the petals of a flower.

"When the bare-poll'd monk was telling of her hands and feet, the woman with the green eyes stopped him and put a question.

"'Was she more lovely than I?' she asked.

"'I am only reading what is written on the palm leaves,' said the monk.

"'But was she?' persisted the woman. 'Tell me at once.'

"'No,' stammered the monk, 'she was lovely, but not as lovely as you!'

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“When he said that to the woman she laughed in a way that chilled my blood. She gave Delnard a chill too. It was a devil of a laugh. It was a laugh of scorn, a laugh of contempt. If a man laughed in the same way you would have killed him with the nearest thing you could get your hands on. *Ach!* I have never heard anyone laugh in the way that woman laughed.

“The monk went on with his story, and Delnard and I listened in the shadows. Dirk Van Tromp and his crew took that girl up to the monastery one night when the moon was at the full, and I choked with temper as I listened. The window of the cell in which the young guardian of the treasure slept looked out over the wall, and when that young monk got up from his prayers on that night he looked out on the moonlit hillside. *Gott in Himmel!* It was a dirty trick to play on that youngster. When he looked through the bars of his cell window he saw that temple dancing girl pirouetting in the middle of that grassy patch, and she looked like a silvered houri!

“That Dutchman was a cunning devil, was he not? He was hiding with his men in the bushes, and that girl was dancing the Dance of the Seven Delights before the eyes of that monk who had never seen a woman till that moment. He pressed his lean face against the bars and watched with

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eyes of astonishment. She was the first woman that he had ever seen, and she was one of the loveliest of her kind. It was not a fair trick, my friend. It was not!

“That girl danced and danced. That bare-pollèd monk described that dance to the Green-eyed Woman, and he described it so well that I could picture everything. I saw that moonlit hillside, and I saw the girl dancing that intoxicating dance to the poor devil in the cell, and I saw Dirk Van Tromp and his crew waiting in the shadows for the climax of that little performance. I never felt like smashing the bones of a dead man as I did on that night when we listened to that yarn.

“And the climax came to that affair. The dancing girl stopped dancing after she had driven that young monk half crazy, and she beckoned to him to come out to her. Beckoned to that poor devil who was wondering if she was a spirit from another world. He forgot all the orders of the head priest when she did that. He forgot everything. He only knew that someone more beautiful than the white orchids of the valley was waiting for him outside the walls, and he rushed madly into the corridor.

“It was then that the Lord Buddha took pity on that poor fool. He performed a miracle by stretching a silver wire across the corridor as the treasure guardian was hurrying along. A silver wire, my

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friend. But that monk was not in a fit state to see a miracle when it was performed right under his nose. His brain and his blood were aflame with the sight of the vision that he had seen in the moonlight, and he hacked that wire through with his knife. That is how the monk read it from the palm leaves to that witch-woman lying on the sand.

“The treasure guardian dropped his knife in his hurry, and he did not wait to pick it up. He ran on like a madman. But it was clean love that was drawing him to that girl, my friend. Ay, it was! And just because his love was good and sweet, Buddha performed another miracle. The Great One stretched a gold wire that blazed like a flaming thread across that corridor. The treasure guardian had no knife, but he had his two hands. He gripped that thread of gold and snapped it. Then he rushed down the dark passage.

“The blood pounded through my head as I listened to that part of the story. I believed that yarn! If you had heard that bare-poll'd monk read it to the woman you would have believed it, too. It was one of those stories where the truth shines through the little places between the words.

“The treasure guardian ran across the courtyard toward the big gates that the High priest had ordered to be closed while Dirk Van Tromp was on the coast, and as he raced across the yard, Buddha

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made another attempt to save him. The Holy One flung a rope in front of that youngster, a rope whose ends went up into the clouds, but that monk could not be stopped by anything just then. *Nein!* He had no knife, and he could not break that rope with his hands, so what do you think he did? He gnawed that rope through with his teeth, then he opened the big gates and rushed out to the dancing girl who was standing like a silver statue of Aphrodite in the moonlight!

“In the morning the monks of the monastery found the treasure guardian trussed up like a capon, and they also found that the treasure chamber was empty. Dirk Van Tromp and his crew of cut-throats did not leave an ounce of gold behind them, and you can just guess what sort of a temper the head priest was in. The treasure guardian told him of the dancing girl in the moonlight, and the old ancient went crazy with temper. He sentenced that young monk to be buried up to the neck in the sand at the point where the girl stood, and when that was done they left him there, bareheaded, and the sun licked at him like the hot tongue of a dragon.

“Every morning for six mornings the monks paraded past that poor devil who was buried in the sand. His tongue and his lips were black and swollen, but they could see that he was praying for forgiveness. They could see that. He was sorry

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for what he had done, but he blamed himself. He did not blame the girl that had lured him outside so that the Dutch pirates could pounce on him.

“On the morning of the seventh day the head priest and the rest of the monks got a surprise. Ay, a big surprise. When they went out to look at that poor wretch they found the temple dancing girl lying on the sand close to the spot where he was buried, and she was dead. Dead and cold. She had become sorry for what she had done in bringing him to his ruin and death. She knew that it was love and not lust that had brought him out to her, and she had come back to tell him that she was sorry. But it was too late to tell him that. She found him dying in the sand, and when he would not let her dig him out of that pit she killed herself beside him.

“The young monk was still alive, and as he looked as if he wished to say something they put water on his swollen tongue so that he was able to speak a little. Then he told them something that made their flesh creep. He said that Buddha had appeared to him in the night, and that the Great One had told him that Dirk Van Tromp would never take the treasure out of the China Sea. Never! He said that it was written that the Dutchman’s ship would beat up and down between Pulo Tiunan and Koh Pennan for all time. At every full moon it would rock past the monastery, and if there was a monk in

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that place who was brave enough to swim out to the ship and recover the treasure, the souls of the treasure guardian and the temple dancing girl would find peace. When the young monk told them that he uttered a little prayer to Buddha and died.

“That was a strange story to listen to in the moonlight, was it not? The bare-poll'd monk looked at the Green-eyed Woman when he had read all that was on the palm leaves, and the woman looked at the big moon that was swinging over the hills. Delnard and I watched her green eyes flash, and we thought things. All the wonder of the East was in those eyes. They were as cold as the icicle eye of a crocodile at times, and then they would soften suddenly so that one felt that he was being dragged toward that witch on the sand.

“‘And you believe that the Dutchman’s ship goes up and down the coast to this day?’ asked the woman.

“‘It is written here,’ said the monk, tapping the palm leaves. ‘They say that it goes by on the night of the full moon. The monks of the monastery looked out many times after that happening, and they saw that ship go rocking by, the moonlight flashing on her gilt figurehead.’

“‘And now?’ she questioned.

“‘I have waited for eight nights,’ answered the monk, ‘and I am certain that she will go by tonight.’

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“‘And you will swim out?’ queried the witch-woman.

“‘If you go with me,’ muttered the monk. ‘My heart would turn to water if you were not near me.’

“She laughed again, that cursed sneering laugh that made one wish she was a man so that one could strike her dead, and just as she laughed I did something that caused a sensation. A mighty big sensation. There were some wild capsicum bushes under those mangrove trees, and those bushes made me sneeze. *Ja!* I sneezed loud enough to wake the dead, and before I had stopped sneezing, Delnard was out in the clearing explaining to the woman and the monk how we came to be there.

“That American had a smooth tongue. You bet he had. The monk looked right mad, but the Green-eyed Woman was not disturbed one bit. She listened to Delnard’s story with a smile on her face, and when he finished she started to question him.

“‘So you heard the story that he read to me?’ she said, pointing to the monk as she spoke.

“‘Yes, I heard,’ said Delnard. ‘It was a mighty good story, too.’

“‘Do you think the ship will come?’ she asked.

“‘I do not know,’ said Delnard, grinning at her, ‘but if it does come along I’d like to go out with you when you board it.’

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"She smiled when he said that, but I cursed him for a fool. That was not our business at all, and there was something in the night that I did not like. I had that sort of gooseflesh feeling that makes people say that someone has jumped over their grave. 'You can come with us,' said the woman. 'Sit down and wait.'

"Delnard and I sat down on the white sand, and I kept thinking of that story as I watched the woman with the emerald eyes. I was afraid of her. I was so. She had the appearance of a sphinx, a sphinx that had just come to life, and who would laugh as she crushed one beneath her feet.

"'Why do you want to stay here?' I asked Delnard. 'It is foolishness.'

"'We will stay for the fun of the thing,' he said, and he laughed because he saw that I was nervous of the woman. 'We will have to stay till dawn to find our way from this place, so we might as well stay close to a mystery.'

"'You are a fool,' I said. 'That woman's eyes remind me of the eyes of the hamadryad.'

"The night was a silent night, one of those nights when you feel that the *lieber Gott* has slowed up the wheels of the planet before doing something that will make you sit up and take notice. The silence came around us like a cloak, and the longer we waited the more annoyed I was with Delnard. I

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did not believe in phantom ships, but I thought as I sat there on the sand that it was the kind of night that you would expect ghostly things of that class to go wandering around.

“A wispy fog came creeping in from the Gulf of Siam, a creeping, low-lying fog that was wet and cold like the hand of a corpse. It swept over us, touching our faces as if it had a million invisible fingers, and it surged up the estuary. I was shivering then with cold and suspense, and I cursed under my breath.

“‘This is foolishness,’ I said to Delnard. ‘It is nonsense to wait here any longer.’

“That woman with the emerald eyes turned her head as if to listen to what I said, and then she gave a little suppressed scream that made my blood run cold. It was not a scream of fear. *Nein!* It was a scream of amazement and wonder.

“‘Look!’ she cried. ‘Look!’

“She was pointing up the estuary, and we looked. *Ja*, we looked. We stared with our eyes popping out. That fog was thin and broken, and through a break in that curtain we saw something that startled us. The monk and Delnard, the Green-eyed Woman and I saw, my friend. Now you can laugh when I tell you what we saw, but I did not laugh that night. Waddling down through that rent in the fog, her broken masts thrust up like black fingers,

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and her high poop tilted up like the tail of a Muscovy drake, was a ship that was out of fashion a hundred years before!

“*Himmel*, didn't we stare! I rubbed my eyes and I looked and looked, thinking that it was a mirage, but it was no mirage. It was an old Dutch ship that was of the same type that Van Edels and Pelsart and Dampier and Van Deiman used when they first stirred the foam of the Eastern seas with bull-snouted craft that were built at Antwerp!

“‘*Aie! Aie!*’ gurgled the monk, as he climbed to his feet and stared at the old ship that was heading for the open sea. ‘It is she! It is she!’ he cried.

“That monk was a mighty scared man at that minute. It was all right to read about the phantom ship, but it was a different business to watch that black hulk breaking through the wispy fog. You bet it was. That bare-poll'd storyteller looked as if he was inclined to sneak away into the mangrove trees, but the Green-eyed Woman looked him up and down, and he seemed to stiffen under her eyes.

“‘Shades of Cæsar!’ cried Delnard. ‘Did you ever see the like of that?’

“‘I did not,’ I snapped, and my lips were dry as I spoke to him.

“That woman was the only one of us who did not

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lose their wits. While we were staring at the apparition that was drifting down toward the point where we were standing, she was calculating the distance and thinking which would be the best place to intercept that ship. That woman had nerves of steel. She was like that jade who was married to Menelaus of Sparta; she could stand by and see battle and bloody murder without turning a hair. She could do anything.

“‘We’ll swim out from here,’ she said, pointing to the water. ‘Get ready or we will miss her.’”

“Delnard looked at me, and I glared back at him. I was mighty mad with him at that moment.

“‘What will we do?’ he asked.

“‘Do?’ I snapped. ‘We will do nothing! What has this fool business to do with us?’”

“That woman was standing in front of me when I said that. She was twisting that purple sarong around her hips, and she heard what I said. *Ja*, she heard. She took three steps into the water, and then she turned her head and laughed at Delnard and me. Laughed that cursed sneering laugh that she had turned on the monk when he was telling the story. Holy St. Catherine! I have never heard a laugh in all my life like that! It was like a whip of scorn. It would drive men to their death quicker than anything I know of. She called us curs with that laugh! Do you understand? It was a lash that

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made us feel like worms, and the next moment we were in the water, swimming beside her and the bare-pollled monk.

“We were swimming in a line, the four of us. I guess we were mad, my friend. It is foolish to sit out on the sand on moonlight nights and listen to stories of the kind that we had listened to that night. There is witchery in the air of this Orient, and one does foolish things under its influence.

“The fog closed in on us and blotted out the black shape of the ship, and I stopped swimming. I had what you call cold feet just then, but that laugh was ringing in my ears. I was tired of that business, and my head was aching from the blow that the Malay boatswain of the *Lost Peri* had given me. I could not see Delnard just then, and I shouted out to him.

“‘Where are you, Delnard?’ I cried.

“‘Here,’ he answered, speaking out of the fog, and just as he spoke, that thick curtain was split apart and I saw the black hulk of the old Dutch ship rolling down on us. *Ach!* I can see her now as I saw her that night. There was a little smother of foam at her forefoot, and she had a coating of barnacles that the Kiel shipyards could not peel off in a week. Then the fog closed in again, and I heard the voice of the Green-eyed Woman calling

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from above me. That witch-woman had got a grip on the side of that craft and she was calling the three of us to her.

“I made a clutch at the rotten timbers as the ship lurched past me, but my fingers slipped on the slime. I made another grab at her, and this time I caught the rotten timbers of a porthole, and I clawed myself up out of the water. That woman was calling out to us, and I knew by the shouts that came from the fog that Delnard and the monk had got a footing on the old hulk as she slewed by. Driving my toes into those barnacles and scratching with my fingers at the rotten wood I climbed higher, and presently that woman’s fingers gripped my shoulder and dragged me over the side. Delnard and the monk were close behind me, and when we hauled them aboard we stood a moment to get our breath.

“It was just as we stood there near the rotten bulwarks that the old boat drove out of the bank of fog. She lurched out of it suddenly, and the moon washed us in a bath of silver. That was when the monk gave the yell. He gave a yell that you could hear down at Sebah where the temple dancing girl came from, and he pointed to the deck in front of us. For a moment we did not see what he pointed at, then our throats went dry like as if we had been swallowing lime. That deck was alive! It was alive with rats!

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“That is the reason why that rat turned me sick a few minutes ago. I think of those rats on the Dutch ship every time I see one. And those rats on that hulk were the biggest rats I have ever seen. The Paris sewer rats, the gray rats of the Orinoco, and the big black rats you see on the canals at Bangkok were small things compared to those devils on the rotten deck of that old craft. They were huge brutes, and there were thousands of them. Thousands! They were crawling up from the hold in armies that moved across the deck so that we could not see an inch of the rotten boards!

“‘Look out!’ I cried. ‘They are attacking us!’

“I made a movement to drop over the side of the ship, but that woman was too quick for me. She was too quick for me. *Nein*, she did not block me with her hands. She laughed at me. I tried to fight against the feeling that came over me, but I could not. I would not have been a man if I ran when she laughed as she did. It would take a mighty good coward to run away when that sneer came from her red lips. You bet it would. Delnard had turned to the rail when I turned, but she stopped both of us. I do not know how the piece of wood got into my hands, but I guess she gave it to me. She was the only one who could think and act. She thrust that stick into my hands, and then I struck at the army that was circling toward us.

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“Have you ever seen rats attack men? Once before I had seen it, but I had never seen anything like the charge I saw on that deck. Those rats were mad with hunger. That old boat had been stranded up that estuary for a century, and she had become a castle for those big rats. I do not know how the tide had shifted her, perhaps she had broken loose from the trunks of the mangrove trees, but that rat army had come with her, and when we boarded her they were hungry. They were mighty hungry. There were thousands of them there, and they were eating each other when that witch-woman brought three fools aboard, *Gott!* The sight of that brute brought it all back this afternoon, and I am sick yet. I will be sick for a week. I know I will.

“‘Fight them!’ cried the woman. ‘Fight them!’

“It was our only hope, my friend. We had to fight like demons to hold those squeaking things off. The deck was covered with them, yet they were still crawling up through the rotten planks from below. It was a nightmare, and a terror struck into my bones. As I swung that stick I thought that the whole business was some devilish plan to get us on board that hulk, and I fought like a madman. So did Delnard. So did the monk, and the Green-eyed Woman. As I watched her for a few seconds I knew that I was wrong in thinking that it was a plot against Delnard and myself. She was a crazy

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woman. She had become possessed with the idea that the old hulk was really the ship that Dirk Van Tromp had sailed in, and that monk was of the same opinion.

"'Fight them back!' screamed the woman. 'The treasure will be on the lower deck.'

"'We are insane,' I cried to Delnard, but he did not hear me. That laugh had made him lose control of himself, and he was slaughtering rats with a plank that it would take a Samson to lift.

"The rats broke before us, and the woman led us on. Led us on across the rotten deck where the cross beams had crumbled beneath the three-inch planks of oak. You can hardly believe it, can you? I was sweating with fear, but I could not turn and run as I wanted to. There was a squeaking in the bowels of the ship that made me feel sure that anyone that ventured down there would go to his death, yet every time that woman gave one of her steely laughs I swung that lump of wood harder than ever. She was a witch, I am sure she was.

"'Take a rest!' she cried, and we stopped for a moment to get our breath.

"But those rats were waiting for us to take that rest. They swept over the deck in one thick mass, and we were at it again. I stuck my foot in a hole and fell down, but Delnard lifted me to my feet again. Lifted me to my feet after three score of

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those things had rushed over me. And she laughed and rushed us forward against the swarms that were pouring out of the holes in the planks.

“It was then that the Almighty heard the prayer that I was making. *Ja*, he heard me then. As I picked my club from the deck after I slipped, my hand clutched some oakum, and when I stumbled on after that mad jade I got an idea. I got an idea that meant salvation to Delnard and me. You cannot guess what that idea was? I stuffed that oakum in my ears, my friend. I stuffed it in with one hand while I fought with the other. *Ja! Ja!* I knew that I could not turn back while that jade was laughing her laugh of scorn, so I made myself so that I could not hear her laugh. I fixed myself in just the same way that old Ulysses fixed his sailors a few thousand years before. I plugged my ears so that I could not hear the squeaking of the rats or her laugh, and then I dropped my stick and rushed at Delnard. I ran him to the side of the ship, and when he fought with me I hit him a crack on the jaw and toppled him overboard as the Malay boatswain had toppled me some hours before.

“I had luck then. I sprang over and found him in the shadow of the hulk, and, grabbing him by the hair of the head I struck out for shore. Once I looked back, and I saw that old black ship moving towards the open sea and I swam faster. Fear was

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in my marrow just then. My teeth were chattering together, and I could hardly speak when I pulled Delnard ashore.

“‘Where is she?’ he asked.

“‘She has gone to sea with the rats and the mad monk,’ I said.

“‘Glory be to God!’ he said and then he broke down and cried. And my nerves were that bad that I cried with him. I have been in a thousand tight places, but I was never in one that made me feel so queer as I felt on that night.

“‘We fell asleep on the sand, and we slept there till the sun climbed out of the sea and pricked our faces and hands. There was not a sign of a hulk. We stared at the sea for ten minutes or more, then Delnard got to his feet and shook himself.

“‘We had better strike toward the south,’ he said, and I went with him without making any protest.

“‘We walked about two miles without speaking, and then we found her. The Green-eyed Woman. *Ja!* We found her on the beach, her mane of gold covering her face as if the sea had tried to hide the staring eyes. In her left hand she had a tiny statue of Siva that had a Mogok ruby in its breast, and I wanted badly to get that little statue. But Delnard would not let me take it from her hand. He would not. We made a grave on the beach, and we buried her there.”

The White Tentacles

VI

THE WHITE TENTACLES

Her eyes were blue, and her soul was white;
His soul had sunk to the soul of a beast.
Yet her love was so great that she found him at last
In the sun-smitten, sin-stricken East.

HOCHDORF, the German naturalist, sat with Ford, the tall American, upon the veranda of the little bungalow in which the German lived, and they looked down at the stretch of rice-white sand upon which the rollers of the China Sea flung themselves incessantly.

Along the white sand walked a slim Dyak girl, and Ford, nodding towards her, put a question to the naturalist.

“What is wrong with her?” asked the American. “I have been watching her for days, and I have noticed her stoop down occasionally as if she was listening when an extra big roller sweeps up the beach.”

“She is listening — listening to the voice of a dead man,” replied Hochdorf. “Five years ago a Dyak boy whom she loved was snapped up by a shark out beyond the reef, and since that time she has

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been listening to the waves because she thinks they bring messages to her."

"By Jove, that's sad," muttered Ford.

"Yes, it is sad," said the naturalist slowly. "Today you said something about dollars ruling the world. You are wrong, my friend. It is love that rules the world. Would you like me to tell you a story to prove what I say? It is a story that is a little bigger than the story of that girl whom you see walking along the beach listening to the messages from a boy that a tiger shark gobbled up five years ago."

Hochdorf took his big meerschaum from his mouth and nodded towards the beach. The slim native girl was stooping down, her head upon one side, as a giant wave came bounding from the China Sea to sprawl upon the silvery sands.

"I will tell you this story from the start," said the naturalist. "About seven years ago I was collecting specimens in the Malay Peninsula. Some crazy fool at Berlin had given a big order for different breeds of monkeys to my house at Amsterdam, and I was kept busy. I was after those monkeys night and day. And those things that I was hunting were the means of bringing me in contact with the girl whom I am going to tell you of.

"A French naturalist at Hue told me of a Shan who knew the jungle so well that he could sit in a

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clearing and make a noise with his mouth that would bring those monkeys that I was seeking to him. So I went one night into a place that was not a nice place, looking for that Shan. It was a place that had only a tissue paper between it and hell. It was a place where the foulest brutes on the coast congregated, and you were sucking in big mouthfuls of soul-poison every time you drew a breath.

“I was sitting there in that reek of opium when the door of the place opened and someone came in out of the velvety night. Someone came in from the alley and walked up the middle of the room, and it seemed to me that the Almighty had sent a breath from heaven into that place.

“The visitor was a girl. She was wondrously beautiful. For five-and-twenty years I never remember seeing any woman who did such credit to her Maker. My pipe dropped from my mouth, and I sat and looked at her as she walked slowly up the center of the room, where four score eyes that showed lust and devilry were looking at her. All the fires of hell were in the eyes of those devils as they gazed at her in a silence so great that the little noises of the night came into that room where three minutes before there was a chatter of tongues that made my ears ache.

“Did you ever see a person walking in their sleep? Well, that girl looked as if she was walking in her

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sleep. But she had her eyes open, and there was a look in those eyes that made me think that her soul was peering out of them, as if seeking something that she desired with a great desire. Those eyes were searching that room for someone, someone whom she thought to find amongst the brutes that leered and stared at her. She was not aware of the eyes of lust and devilry that were turned on her like flames. She walked as if she was in a trance, and I clutched the table and looked at her.

“I got upon my feet and I gripped the revolver that I carried in my pocket. A Malay whose nose was flattened all over his face was walking towards the girl with his arms outstretched, and I went mad as I looked at the brute. I went crazy because I was afraid that he would put his fingers on her.

“‘Keep off,’ I yelled. ‘Keep away.’

“The brute looked at me and laughed.

“‘Why?’ he cried.

“‘Keep off, you dog!’ I roared. And then I drew my revolver and pointed it at him.

“*Himmel!* It was a crazy business to draw a gun in a place like that. But I was not myself then. My common sense had been swept away the moment I saw her face show up through a rift in the opium smoke, when the night wind that followed her into that room swept away the yellow cloud as if to purify the place for her presence.

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“But the Malay with the flat face saw nothing of a miracle in the coming of the girl into that vile place. He walked right up to her and I upset the table in front of me in rushing to prevent him touching her.

“I struck at the brute as his hands reached out to the girl. I struck at him like a madman, and he went down upon the floor. I must have gone mad. Something snapped within my skull, and I was a fighting lunatic.

“Those yellow and brown devils rushed at me, and I kicked and fought and yelled. I was trying to balk them of a prize which they thought their respective little gods had sent into that place of sin. They came at me like a wave. My interference maddened them, and they were willing to tear me to pieces and toss me out to the dogs that were in the alley.

“I fought and kicked and emptied my pistol at the mob that rushed me. Afterwards, when I had time to think, I had a feeling that I was as strong as ten men as I fought with those devils.

“After what seemed a century, I found myself running down a side alley away from that den, and on one side of me was the girl who had come into that place, and on the other side of me was the Shan whom I have told you of—the Shan who could sit in the jungle and talk to those monkeys that

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made me tired chasing them. I wanted to pull up, but the Shan, who knew a little about wild animals, and who knew what that crowd behind me would do if they caught me, urged me forward.

“‘Go ahead,’ he cried, speaking in his own tongue. ‘They are after us!’

“And the girl tried to keep me running, too.

“‘Run!’ she murmured. ‘They are coming after us! Listen to them!’

“I looked at her face as we passed beneath a lamp, and I saw a change in her. The trance-like look that had been in her eyes when she entered that little hell had disappeared, and there was a look of fear there that tore at my heart. It made me wonder as I ran.

“‘Don’t stop,’ she gasped. ‘Run! Run!’

“And I knew when she cried out in that way that she had awakened out of her trance in time to see the looks of devilry on the faces of those brutes.

“Their yells came down on the night wind, and we ran on. I was faint with the loss of blood. I had a cut over my eye and I was blinded with the blood that came from it. I staggered as I ran, and the girl put out her hand and gripped my arm, and urged me to run faster.

“We raced down little alleys and dodged through places that were like by-ways in hell. And all the time we seemed to hear the yells of that mob pur-

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suing us—that mob of brutes who were cursing their little gods and josses for taking away the prize that had drifted into that den of filth.

“After a long run we came out on a street that was clean and well lighted, and we stopped to get our breath. The Shan left us there. He thought that he was not wanted any more, and he disappeared up a side street before the girl had time to thank him.

“Then the girl found a street fountain and she wet her handkerchief and bathed the wound that I had over my eye. I protested, but she would do it, and all the time she was babbling thanks for what I had done.

“‘It was good of you,’ she sobbed. ‘It was very good of you. You stopped those brutes from touching me. I came to my senses in time to see their awful faces.’

“‘Then you were not in your senses when you went into that place?’ I asked.

“‘Yes, I was in my senses, but I did not know where I was going,’ she answered.

“I wondered much at what she told me, but I did not ask any more questions. She told me that she was staying with a missionary, and I took her to the missionary’s house. And when I was leaving she asked me to call and see her the following morning.

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“I called next morning, and now I will tell you the story she told me. It is a story that has made me think very much. When I think over it I laugh at the man who says that dollars rule the world as I heard you say not so very long ago. No, my friend, it is love that rules the world.

“This is the story that she told me. Five years before, her lover had come out from America to make his fortune. He had sworn to her father that he would not come back till he had made it. Her father did not want him back. Do you understand?

“That young fellow was a dreamer who was not the sort of a man to make his fortune out here. I think the girl’s father knew that much. Perhaps he knew what this country is. He had sized up the young fellow, and he thought he was not the person who would be able to fight himself clear of the tentacles of the Orient. Perhaps he laughed to himself when the youngster started out for this spot to make the money with which to marry the girl with the blue eyes.

“When the girl was telling me of the boy who had come out here, I pictured him. She told me what he was like, and she described him with the eyes of love so that she pointed out his weaknesses without knowing that they were weaknesses.

“And it made me feel sick as I listened. My imagination pictured that young fellow coming out

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to this place. I pictured him with the face that was not the face of a fighter coming out here where the atmosphere and the century-old smells that come from the ground throttle a young man's morals and damn his soul.

"I have seen hundreds go the path that my imagination told me that young fellow had gone. For three years the young man wrote letters to the girl away over there in America. For three years he wrote letters to her, always telling her what he was going to do, for he was one of those men who dream of big jobs which they have not got the strength to do. She showed me his letters, and I read them through with a pain in my heart. She couldn't see what I saw. They were the letters of a man who was fighting a losing battle, and who was trying to make himself think that it was a winning one by putting foolish words on paper and looking at them.

"I could not tell the girl what I thought. I could not fling a shadow on those blue eyes that were like little bits of the heavens on a May morning. I could only shake my head as she unfolded her story bit by bit.

"'You see he was always fighting to get on,' she said. 'That is why he went from place to place looking for an opening.'

"For three years the young fellow wrote letters to her. Then his letters stopped. I wonder how

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many mothers, and sisters, and sweethearts there are in the world who know the heart pain that comes when the letters of young men, like the letters of that girl's young man, stop all of a sudden.

“For two years he did not write a single word. Then the girl's father died. He died, and his death gave the girl a surprise. She had thought that he was poor. He had told her that he was poor. He had told her that he could not give the boy a penny piece to start him in business in America. But she found that he had been wealthy, and she prayed that she might not remember him with bitterness for sending away from her the boy whom she had loved with all her soul.

“Now, you will understand a little bit of what I want to tell you. She came to Calcutta, which was the last place from which the young man had written, and she sought him there. It makes my heart sick to think of it. She searched for him up and down, and after she had given up all hope of striking a trail, a curious thing happened to her. It is an unbelievable thing to a man who does not know the East. While she was hunting for that boy in the slums of Calcutta with her nerves upon a great strain, she passed one day a place where she thought he had once been. She had no proof that he had ever visited that place, but as she was going by the door, she had a desire to enter it to

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see if he was there. She had a great desire—a desire that was so great she could not overcome it.

“She went in and searched for him. And after she came out, she was amazed at what she had done. She was amazed to think that she had ventured into that little opium hell on the Chitpore Road.

“She went from Calcutta to Rangoon, from which place he had written her some two and a half years before. And she had the same experience at Rangoon. She was attracted to a place, and she felt sure that the boy had been there at some time. And she was right on that occasion at Rangoon. She might have been right the first time, but she had no proof. But she got proof on the second occasion. Behind the bar of that *samshu* shop in Rangoon she found a fly-specked letter addressed to the boy whom she had not heard of for over two years. It had been waiting in that place for over eighteen months.

“She left Rangoon and she came on to Singapore, following the trail left by his letters. She told me what happened at Singapore. She had two experiences that were similar to those I have just told you of. And when I questioned her on those two experiences I felt sick. If she was right in her belief that she had been drawn to places where he had been, I felt certain that he was a little lower

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than I had thought. I was certain that the tentacles of the Orient had caught him and throttled him.

“In one of those places she had found a man who knew him. A man who was drugged with the black smoke twenty-three hours out of twenty-four. In the few minutes that he was in his senses he told her little things, and she told them to me. And she told them to me not thinking that there was any harm in what was in them. Great love never sees a fault, my friend. That girl wondered over those strange desires to visit places just as much as I wondered over them.

“‘Do you understand why I have entered those places?’ she asked, when she had finished her story. ‘Can you explain it?’

“‘No, I cannot explain it,’ I said. ‘There are many things here that I do not understand.’

“‘But you think he might have been in those places?’ she asked.

“‘I think he might have been,’ I said. ‘He might have gone into them.’

“‘To look at them?’ she said, and her blue eyes were upon my face.

“‘To look at them,’ I repeated. ‘Just so.’

“I was sick with a soul sickness when I said that. I am an old general, and I have been in this East so long that I am able to go to sleep at night without troubling myself over temptations that are

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in the atmosphere that you sniff, and in the silence of the night, and in the whispers of the trees. I am a German, and the feet of the Germans are screwed to the ground, so that we are not knocked over with temptations that upset men who have not our phlegmatic spirit.

“When she had finished I spoke to her.

“‘Go home and forget him,’ I said. ‘I am an old man and I know.’

“The pain that showed upon her face hurt me. She looked at me as if I had struck her a blow. I could have kicked myself for saying those words.

“‘I cannot forget him!’ she cried.

“Then I steeled my heart and spoke again to her.

“‘You must forget him,’ I said. ‘I tell you that you must forget him.’

“She shook her head and looked at me with those blue eyes as if she was trying to see into my soul to know if I really meant what I said.

“‘I must find him!’ she cried.

“I was crazy then to end her search.

“‘He might be dead,’ I said. ‘If a man does not write in two years from the Orient you must think him dead.’

“And there was truth in what I said. It is dangerous for a man to forget his relations and friends when he is living here. Letters are the little anchors. I have seen a man who was on the

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verge of insanity made sane by a long letter which came to him from a girl he loved.

“‘He is not dead!’ she cried, and her eyes flamed at me till I thought I was being pricked by rapier points. ‘I know that he is alive! I feel it every day. Sometimes I feel that I am very near to him, and there are times when I feel that he is far away, but never have I felt that he is dead.’

“I left Hue that evening and she was the last one I spoke to. When I was going to the wharf, I called at the little house of the missionary, and the girl came out on the veranda to say good-by to me. She knew that I was troubled about her, and she tried to smile so that I would think that she was all right.

“‘You mustn’t worry your head about me,’ she said. ‘I have caused you enough trouble already. You will always carry that mark over your eye to remember me by.’

“‘I will remember you without a mark,’ I said. ‘I will remember you always.’

“I went up to Shanghai and from there I went up the Wusung hunting for specimens for my employers in Amsterdam. But the joy with which I had found things before did not come to me now that the face of the girl was before my mind. I could think of nothing but her, and her search for the man who had not written to her for two years.

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“I came back to Shanghai and from there I went to Canton and spent three months in catching things to ship to Amsterdam. I was very busy, but still I would think every day about that girl who was searching for the man who had been caught in the grip of this infernal Orient.

“I went from Canton to Bangkok. Scheibel was at Bangkok, and I spent much of my time smoking with him in the hot evenings. And one night I told him of the girl, and how she had walked into that place at Hue where there were forty-seven first cousins of the devil watching her. Scheibel sat quiet for a minute and then turned to me.

“‘What is the man’s name?’ he asked.

“‘His name is Falkner,’ I said. ‘Henry Falkner.’

“He looked at me for a few minutes without speaking, and I knew that I had found someone who could tell me if my suspicions were true.

“‘You know him?’ I asked.

“‘I *knew* him,’ he said slowly.

“‘Is he dead then?’ I questioned.

“‘He is worse than dead,’ said Scheibel. ‘You must write to her, Hochdorf, and tell her to go home. Send her home, man!’

“‘I don’t know where she is,’ I snapped. ‘She was staying with an American missionary at Hue, but she did not intend to stay long there. Tell me what you know.’

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"'I told you that he is worse than dead,' said Scheibel. 'Three years ago he was a clerk in my office, but I found out things as the days rolled by. When I found that he had been opium smoking I threw him out of my office. After that I would see him now and again. He was no longer a man. He was a thing—a thing that yellow men and brown men looked at with contempt. They would pass him by on the street and laugh.

"'And he would do things to get money that they would not do. He was the lowest of the low. Send her home, Hochdorf! Send her home! There is no hope for him. If he is not dead he is so near to it that it would not be nice for her to see him.'

"I looked at Scheibel and I thought of the girl as I had seen her on that night.

"'She would not go back,' I said. 'She will not go back till she finds him.'

"'But she must not find him now,' said Scheibel. 'She will not be able to do anything for him. Hochdorf, he is as low as it is possible for a man to get. I have never seen a thing like him since I have come to this country. It is three months since I have seen him, and I bet he is now a hundred feet lower in sin and filth than he was the last time I put my eyes on him.'

"That story made my heart sick. I could not tell the girl. I could only hope that she would get

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tired and would go back home to a clean country where there is no fierce sunshine and no curious odors that stir desires like there are in this land.

“The fear that she might come across the wreck of a man that Scheibel had pictured became a horror to me. It kept me awake at night. I am little better than a pagan, but I prayed that she might never come face to face with the man she sought. I had not prayed for years, but I prayed that she might be spared that horror. It would be better for her to search for him for the rest of her days than to find him the wreck that I knew him to be.

“I went up the Meinam and I trapped there for four months. I went back to Shanghai, and I sent a consignment of specimens to Amsterdam, and then I came back again on a bull-nosed lugger up the Gulf of Siam to Bangkok. It was sixteen months since I had seen the girl, but I had not forgotten those eyes of blue that had a spiritual look in them that I have never seen in the eyes of a human being.

“Now, I will tell you something that makes me feel sure that as many miracles take place today as in the days when they ran short of wine at the marriage feast in Canaan. One day I was walking along near the Golden Temple of Wat Sutat when I saw a white man coming towards me. He was nothing but skin and bone. He was shambling along by the temple wall, holding himself up by clutching

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the rough stone when he stumbled. And the first glance which I gave him made me feel certain that I had found the man that the girl with the wonderful blue eyes was seeking. The thing that was coming towards me with the eyes that had gone back into the caverns of the skull, and the face drawn with all the lines that vice could put upon it, was Falkner!

"He came up to me whining like a whipped cur.

"'Give me money,' he cried. 'For the love of God give me money.'

"'Who are you?' I asked. 'What is your name?'

"He could not answer me. He could only mumble the word 'money,' and his mouth slobbered as I looked at him.

"I caught him by the shoulder and I shook him gently.

"'Your name is Falkner,' I said. 'Henry Falkner.'

"A look of fear came into his face when I said that. He tried to wrench himself free from my grip, and when I would not let him, he clawed at me with his thin fingers and spat curses at me.

"He fought me till he was exhausted. The opium-pipe had drained him of his strength, and he was like a baby in my grip. His thin hands were so transparent that you could nearly see through

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them, and he did not weigh more than a child of ten years. When he was too exhausted to struggle with me, I took him in my arms and carried him to the room that I rented over the shop of a German who dealt in pearls and Burmese rubies.

“After three days, when I had brought him a little to his senses, I told him about the girl who was going up and down the land looking for him. I told him how she had visited places because she thought he had been there, and I found when I told him the story, that although he had lost everything that a man prizes in gratifying his desire for the cursed opium, he had not lost shame. When I told him she had searched for him, he became mad with a fear lest she might find him.

“It was a terrible fear. He would not go into the street, even when the desire for the drug was biting him with a million tongues. He would not go near the window to look out on the street. A step upon the stairs would send him like a whipped cur under the table for fear it was the step of the girl who was searching for him. It was terrible. He knew what he was, and what he would look like to that girl if she put her eyes upon him, but even then he did not have the power to fight against the craving. He was one of those dream persons who lack the power to fight. The drug was as necessary to him as the air he breathed, and after two months

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of fighting I came to the conclusion that he would never throw off the tentacles that gripped him. I was certain that he could not.

“Falkner’s fight against those cravings was a mighty big fight. I would get him and hold him and tell him of that girl till he would cry like a child, but I had no sooner finished speaking, when up out of the back of his head would hop those cravings that had to be appeased.

“I took him with me to Saigon, and there we continued that fight, he and I. We fought that thing night and day, but it was no use. The disease had a grip on him that I could not break. It had a grip on him that was so powerful that it would make him climb into the depths of hell to get to the drug he wanted. And I saw that it was no use to struggle with him, with the intention of bringing him near that girl. I am not a sentimental fool. I knew that he was too deep in the mud to be the proper company for a girl who was as pure as one of the angels who sit at the footstool of God. And he knew it! He knew that he had been bad clean through, and when I would tell him about the girl, he used to squirm in agony.

“‘I could never look at her, Hochdorf,’ he would say. ‘I could never look at her after what I have been.’

“‘Try,’ I would say. ‘You can never tell.’

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“‘But I can tell!’ he would say again and again. ‘I might pull myself out of the mud, but it is not right that I should go before her to try and recover the place I have lost by my own actions.’”

“Day after day as I talked with him I began to see that he was right. I began to see that no matter what that woman’s love was for him, it would be wrong for him to marry her. Three years in the stew of wickedness in which he had been had made him a man who was not fit to marry her.

“‘Try and fight for your own sake,’ I would say to him.

“‘I will, Hochdorf,’ he said. ‘I will, but do not mention her to me again. It will only bring my sins up before my eyes.’”

“So I did not speak of the girl again because I thought it would not be right. I took his view of it. Some people might think it would be nice for me to put a clean suit of clothes on him, and brush his hair and shave him, and lead him up before that girl and say: ‘Here is your sweetheart back again.’ But I am not that kind. I knew that I would be handing her a wreck that had been poisoned by the devils of the Orient. By those purple devils that are in the breezes, and the hot nights, and the silence! He was soaked through and through with the poison of that place, and it would take a lifetime to free him of the desires and the cravings

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that had come to him during the time that he had dallied with the vice that had him in its clutch.

“I had to go down to Singapore, and he cried to come with me. He was like a baby who dreaded to be left alone.

“‘I want to be near you, Hochdorf,’ he cried.

“‘All right,’ I said. ‘Come along with me.’

“I paid his passage for her sake. I had seen that girl searching for him in a place where a brave man would think three times before walking into it. So I paid his fare to Singapore. I put him in my cabin and I locked the door. Then I went up on deck and watched the passengers come on board.

“Now, I am going to tell you the strangest part of this story. Just at the last minute before that boat threw off her ropes, I saw something that made my heart stop. I happened to look down upon the gangway, and coming up it was the girl with the wonderful blue eyes and the pure face whom I had spoken to at Hue sixteen months before. It was she, and it was strange that when I looked at her, she had the same peculiar look in her eyes that she had when she walked into that den where the Malay tried to put his dirty hands upon her.

“I was more afraid at that moment than I had ever been. I was telling myself that the Almighty had made me a buffer between that girl and the wreck that was in my cabin, and as I watched her

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coming up the gangway, I felt that all my plans would be overthrown.

“A steward at the bottom of the gangway put out his hand as if he would stop her, but he dropped it quick and stared at her as if he had seen a ghost. And one or two others who were in her way got out of her path and looked at her as she went by.

“I had a creepy feeling when I looked at her at close quarters. I was thinking of the thing in the cabin that I had locked in there before I came on deck. ‘*Himmel!*’ I said to myself, ‘she feels that he is near, and she will go to him!’ And I was determined to shake her out of her trance lest she might find him.

“I walked over to her and I spoke, and she came to herself with a start. A flush swept over her white face like the flush upon the snow of the Himalayas when the sun peeps up out of the China Sea.

“‘It is Mr. Hochdorf,’ she said quietly. ‘I had a strange feeling just now. I was drawn aboard this boat because —’

“I knew without being told that the girl had come aboard that boat without baggage or anything else solely because she had a feeling that the man she loved was on board. I asked her all sorts of questions, foolish questions, and she tried to answer me as the *Ka Lang* turned her nose southward.

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"She said that she had been hunting up and down the coast since the day that I had left her at Hue. She had collected a thousand little bits of information, but she had not weakened one little bit. I could tell that by the way she told me of the places into which she had gone searching for him, places that would have brought ten million suspicions to the mind of a girl who did not love as she loved.

"'And I—I do not know why I came aboard,' she murmured. 'I was drawn aboard. Oh, Mr. Hochdorf, I felt that he was close! Could it be possible? Could it be possible that he is on board?'

"She looked at me with those wonderful blue eyes of hers till I thought that the lie which I stammered out was printed big across my face.

"'I have just looked over the passenger list,' I stammered, 'and there are only five white people aboard. You and I and three missionaries.'

"The tears trickled down her cheeks as she sat looking at me as the old tub ploughed through the waters that were smeared with gold from the afternoon sun.

"'I shall go on searching till I find him,' she said simply. 'I shall surely find him, if it is only for the space of ten minutes before he dies. I am sure of it.'

"I went back to the cabin and I told Falkner that she was aboard the *Ka Lang*, and he became a

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crazy man. He tried to climb under the berth for fear that she might pass by the cabin and see him. He wanted me to get hold of the passenger list and scratch his name off, and he made a dash at the door with the intention of springing overboard when I refused to do what he wanted me to do. He was not like the proud sinner who gets out on the street corners and tells of all the wickedness that he has done as if it was something to brag about. I had to lock that cabin door and fight with him to stop the fool from jumping into the waters of the China Sea.

“I calmed him at last, and made him see that it was impossible for her to discover that he was on board. I told him that she would never know. But although he lay quiet, he had his eyes fixed on the door as if he was afraid that she might enter at any minute. He would not sleep. He just lay on the bunk and watched the door. And I watched it, too, because I had a feeling that something might happen that would upset my plans.

“And something did happen. I think it must have been about two o'clock in the morning when I heard a cry of fire. I sprang from the berth and a chill crept over me as I thought of that old sun-bitten steamer with her dry planks, and how she would burn when once the fire got a grip of her.

“And it had a grip on her when I rushed through

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the saloon. Clouds of smoke were coming down the companionway, and when I fought my way on deck, I saw in one glance that the old *Ka Lang* was doomed. Little red snakes of fire were racing along the planks and biting at the rail, and there was a roaring hell gnawing at the stomach of that old craft. The purr of the fire went out into the silence of the night, and I was sick as I looked at the devilish little whips of flame that licked at the planks of the old tub.

"I thought of that girl first. I forgot Falkner. I only thought of saving her. And I was mad with myself, although I did not know why I should be mad. I thought that it was my fault that she was aboard, but of course my thought was wrong.

"I knew where the girl was sleeping, and I ran along the passage towards her cabin. But the fire that was eating up the timbers of the *Ka Lang*, beat me back. The smoke throttled me with a million fingers. I fell on my knees and tried to crawl forward but I could not.

"I was rushing towards the companionway with fear biting at my heart when I stumbled against Falkner. He caught me by the shoulders and thrust his face close to mine. He had the face of a devil at that moment. I have never seen anything like it. And he had grown stronger in a way that surprised me.

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“‘Where is she?’ he roared. ‘Quick, you fool! Tell me where she is!’

“I pointed to the passage out of which I had come in a hurry, and from which the smoke was rolling as if the passage was the funnel of a Bibby liner.

“‘What is the number of her cabin?’ he shrieked.

“‘Twenty-seven,’ I roared. ‘But you cannot get to it!’

“The flames were singing their song with a throaty bass just then. The red snakes of fire seemed to know that it was impossible for anyone to save that old tub, and they sang a song of triumph as they ate her up. And those great masses of smoke rolled over the boat and clutched at our throats with the fingers of death. But Falkner did not care. He was a madman just then. He sprang into the smoke that rolled out of the passage, and I lost sight of him. He dived into the black clouds, and I stumbled up the companionway on to the deck.

“All hell had been unloosed on that deck. The *Ka Lang* had a crew that had been raked together in places where a decent sailorman will take precious good care that he is not stranded. They were black, and brown, and yellow, and they were children of the devil, every one of them.

“The English skipper had made an attempt to

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stop those niggers, but he had failed. He was knocked down and trampled on, and when I stumbled on deck they were trying to launch the second boat of the *Ka Lang*. They had swamped the first in trying to get it into the water, and it looked as if they would swamp the second by the way they were going on. They were clawing, and shouting and screaming like lunatics.

“I turned to run back to my cabin for my revolver, but as I turned I ran into Falkner. He plunged up the stairs, carrying in his arms something — something that I knew to be the girl I had failed to rescue! He had her in his arms, and I knew that she was unconscious.

“Falkner seemed to understand everything with the one glance he took at those devils who were struggling to launch the boat. He thrust the girl into my arms, and made a dash at them. There must have been thirty of those mad fiends, but he dashed at them without thinking of numbers.

“Have you ever seen a fight where the fighting devil that was in one man went out and put the fear of God in the hearts of a score? That is what I saw then. That opium smoker who had sunk into the depths of hell was a madman who could beat five hundred. He picked up an oar and he swung it round his head with a strength that I would never have thought was in him.

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“The flames that were eating up the *Ka Lang* made the deck as light as day, and as I stood there looking with astonishment at Falkner dealing with those brutes, the girl came to her senses. And she saw! She saw the man for whom she had been searching through weary months, watched him with those wonderful eyes of hers that were brimming over with admiration and love.

“I have seen men fight, men with big muscles and big bodies, but I have never seen a fighter like Falkner. There was something supernatural about him that made those niggers shrink back from him, and I looked at him in wonder as he swung that oar and kept them at bay.

“The English captain and the half-caste mate got to their feet, and after one look at Falkner, they started in a hurry to get the boat into the water. I stood with the girl in my arms, but Falkner woke me up then. He screamed at me to put the girl into the boat, and when I did not move quick enough, he screamed at me again.

“‘The boat!’ he cried. ‘Get into the boat, you fool!’

“And I obeyed, still holding the girl in my arms with her eyes watching him.

“I do not know how I got into that boat, but I know that I did. The girl cried out to Falkner as I fell into the boat with her in my arms; and he

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looked down at her then. He looked down at her for a single second, and I saw his face in that second. It was not the Falkner that I had talked with in my cabin the evening before. It was a new Falkner. His face was transfigured in a way that made me wonder about it for many a long day afterwards. I did not see the lines of vice upon it at that moment. It seemed good to look upon, and in those few seconds that they looked at each other I felt that I witnessed a miracle, yes, a miracle because of her great love.

“A cloud of black smoke rolled over Falkner and blotted him from our view. That girl screamed again and again, and cried out to the captain to save Falkner, but the captain knew that the thing was impossible. He knew and I knew that the black smoke which had swept over Falkner would make those brown devils blind to the power which had held them off from him. As we pulled from the *Ka Lang*, I caught a glimpse through a rift in the smoke of that horde sweeping across the deck where he had held them at bay.

“We had little time to puzzle over what had happened to Falkner. We had not pulled fifty yards from the *Ka Lang* when the old boat gave a sudden tilt forward, and plunged. And that was the last of her. She went down with a single plunge, and the darkness that had been thrust back by those snaky

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flames came down upon us so thick and heavy that we felt we were being choked.

“The whole business had happened so quickly that I wondered if I was dreaming. I shook myself, and then as I sat in the stern of the boat, listening to the sobbing of the girl, I blessed the *lieber Gott* for the way He had planned things. For two minutes He had transformed that wreck of a man into a demi-god, and the girl had in her mind a picture that was a good picture for her to keep—a picture of her lover fighting like a Viking against odds of thirty to one.

“That is about all of my story. We were picked up at daybreak by a French steamer and carried down to Singapore. I wish you could have heard the girl describe to the mate of the steamer the way that Falkner had met his death. It made that mate cry, and he was not a tender-hearted person either.

“I took her to the home of a missionary at Singapore and I left her there. She had made up her mind to take a boat up to Yokohama, where she would ship home. She said good-by to me without asking me any questions as to whether Falkner had accompanied me aboard the *Ka Lang*. And I was glad of it. I should have had to tell lies, and I was afraid her blue eyes would see the word ‘liar’ on my face. I am not a good liar.

“Sometimes now as I sit and look at that Dyak

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girl who puts her head down to the waves so that she can hear the messages which she thinks her dead lover is sending to her, I think that the Almighty has tried to ease her grief as he tried to ease the sorrow of the girl whom I met in that little hell at Hue, the girl with the eyes of blue.”

The Three Who Fled

VII

THE THREE WHO FLED

MONSIEUR DE TROLLE looked out of a little window in the Hospital of The White Nuns. He looked out upon the sun-bitten desert. The hospital was built on the very fringe of the gray sand wastes that stretched away to El-Shafa.

Monsieur De Trolle was puzzled. He had hurried to the hospital in response to an urgent message sent to him by the good nuns. A dying man wished to see him, a dying man who would not give his name.

A soft-footed sister came hurrying along the corridor and bowed to De Trolle. De Trolle was the French consul, and the nuns treated him with the greatest respect.

"I will take you to him now," murmured the sister. "It is dangerous for him to talk, but he says that he must speak to you."

"Is he very ill?" asked De Trolle.

"*Oui*," she said sadly, "he is very ill. Dr. Huignon has done everything but—" She shrugged her shoulders and turned to lead the way.

The consul followed. The corridor was wonder-

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fully cool. The thick stone walls kept out the hot blasts that swept across the great gray wastes. A score of palms that stood like sentinels on the eastern side of the building waved their fronds as if trying to ward off the sand-laden winds. The djinns of the desert warred against the long stone building.

There was an atmosphere of repose within the hospital, an atmosphere which made the consul think that death might come easy to one within those walls. Clean odors came to the nostrils of De Trolle as he followed the nun, clean aseptic odors that fought with the century-old smells that drifted in through the windows. Here on the very fringe of the wastes the good sisters struggled to save the lives of those who fell in the battle with the desert.

The nun opened the door of a room at the extreme end of the cool corridor, and motioned Monsieur De Trolle to enter. Another white-robed sister, the double of her who had acted as guide, stood beside a little iron bed in the center of the room, and she bowed low to the consul. Monsieur De Trolle bowed in return, then he fixed his small black eyes upon the man on the bed.

Monsieur De Trolle moved toward the bed and addressed the occupant.

“You wish to speak to me?” he said gently.

The sick man looked at the round good-natured

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face of the consul. "I do," he said quietly. "I have a story to tell you. It is a long story, so you had better sit down."

The nun who had been standing beside the little bed slipped out of the room, leaving the consul alone with the stranger who had begged for a visit. De Trolle, sitting beside the bed, studied the face of the sick man. It was a remarkable face. The man on the bed was in the prime of life, and De Trolle, observing him quietly, felt convinced that he had never seen a face which expressed such force. The nose was a fighting, imperious nose. The eyes were black and flashing, fearless eyes with a cruel hawk-like gleam in their depths. The mouth, although drawn with pain, was still possessed of a firmness that amazed De Trolle. The lips made a straight gray line, and the iron jaws were clamped as the sick man returned the quiet stare of the consul.

De Trolle was fascinated by the face. The whole countenance exhibited a strength which seemed to resent the approach of death. The mouth, the nose and eyes might have been those of an emperor, and the very nearness of the Reaper could not rob the features of their superb insolence.

De Trolle was interrupted in his study by a question which the sick man put to him, a question which made the consul thrust his face down close to that of the stranger. He had put a query in a soft voice.

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"You don't remember me, Jean?" he asked.

De Trolle opened his mouth, shut it again, thrust his head a little closer to the sick man, and then, as if he found within the flashing black eyes a light which lit up the dim records of the past, he said quietly:

"It is—it is Pierre Lepre!"

The gray line of the mouth relaxed in a half smile.

"It is Pierre Lepre," repeated the man upon the bed. "It is a long while since we met. Yesterday—yesterday the nun mentioned that you were consul here, and so I sent for you."

De Trolle's hand reached out and touched the brown muscular fingers of the man upon the bed. And the consul winced as those iron fingers closed upon his white and somewhat flabby hand. The fingers were possessed of a remarkable strength, and the consul could hardly choke a cry of pain as they closed around his own.

Pierre Lepre spoke after a moment's silence.

"You have heard of me since our school days at Dijon?" he questioned.

The consul nodded his head slowly. "I have heard a little of you," he said. "Now and then there have come to my ears interesting little stories about you."

Again the gray lines of the mouth relaxed in a

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smile. It was a smile that told De Trolle that Pierre Lepre was fully aware of the kind of stories which the consul had heard. And Monsieur De Trolle made no effort to alter the impression which the sick man had drawn from his answer. The stories which he had heard of Pierre Lepre were stories that men told in whispers in quiet places. From Tangier to Damietta the doings of Pierre Lepre, or Pierre the Devil as he was better known, were whispered of in little wine-shops and Arab cafés. Now as the consul's fingers recovered from the terrific grip, De Trolle wondered what mishap had brought the fighting daredevil to the door of death.

The consul waited for Lepre to speak. The flashing, fearless eyes of the sick man were upon De Trolle's face, studying it as if doubtful whether the consul was really the person to hear the story which he desired to unburden himself of before death came to him. After a long pause he decided in De Trolle's favor. His hands gripped the bars at the head of the bed and he drew himself up till he rested upon his elbow.

"I am going to tell you something, De Trolle," he said. "Something which I must tell before I die. Do you know that I am going to die?"

The consul swallowed hurriedly. "*Non*, I do not," he answered.

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“Well, you know now,” said Pierre the Devil. “I am going to die before the night is out, and I want to tell you something before I go.”

Once again there came a hush upon the little room. A soothing silence was upon the place. De Trolle wondered if he had ever felt such an intense peace.

“You have heard little stories of me, you say,” said Lepre, breaking the silence, “and I know they were stories that were not to my credit. But they were true—too true. I am doing no death-bed repentance, and I am going to face the end without any regrets. I have not been a saint and I have not brought you here to contradict anything that you have ever heard of me. I have asked you to come so that I might tell you of one happening which you must listen to because I cannot die without telling it. It is the story of a miracle, De Trolle. A miracle, do you hear?”

“*Oui*, I hear,” said the consul.

“I must tell you the story from the beginning,” said Lepre, “right from the beginning. I have got to tell you everything. I have got to tell you of the girl, and of Galische, and of the old devil of a holy man who made my life a hell. I must tell you all and you must listen because I am going to die, De Trolle, and I cannot die with this on my mind. Last night I tried to die but I could not, and this morning I sent for you.

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“This began at Sidi-Bel-Abbès, the headquarters of *La Légion Etrangère*. It began with a girl, De Trolle, a girl verging into womanhood. You have got to listen to what I tell you about that girl. I have got to tell you of her so that you will understand. She had eyes that would light a man’s soul down to hell, eyes that at one moment flashed like the eyes of Antiope and at another moment had all the softness within them that we used to see in the eyes of the big picture of St. Agnes of Beaupriere in the church at Dijon. I have never seen such eyes.

“The Kabyles tell of the Green Snake of Ain-Sefra that the dancing women pray to for the suppleness which is their charm. That girl had it. By the Bones of the Little Corsican, she had it! She was beautiful, De Trolle! She had hair that the devil could have plaited into a ladder to lower men’s souls into the deepest depths. She had moist little lips the like of which I have never seen, and she had arms — lithe rounded arms, De Trolle, that, locked around a man’s neck, would drag him to hell and further. Are you sick of this talk, *mon ami?*”

De Trolle shook his head. “I will listen,” he said quietly. “I will listen to anything you have got to tell me.”

“You must listen,” said the sick man. “You must listen to this part of my story because it

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explains the end. If I could have died without telling it, I would have held my tongue, but I cannot die, I cannot.

“A holy man — a Moslem — brought that girl to Sidi-Bel-Abbès, a holy man with a heart like a Gaboon viper. He brought her to Sidi-Bel-Abbès to sell her, to sell her for a monthly sum that would keep him in luxury.

“He found a purchaser. You think I am bad, De Trolle, but let me tell you that *le bon Dieu* would not pause a moment in deciding between me and Lieutenant Galische. If ever the devil is overthrown, it will be Galische who will head the insurrection. Perhaps he has overthrown him now. *Oui*, he is in hell in front of me, De Trolle.

“Galische bought her. His father was a banker on the Rue de Ferriol at Marseilles, and he had gold to throw away. He had killed a man on the Vieux Porte and he could not go back to prance up and down the Cannebiere.

“He bought her for that old wrinkled devil who, while living on the money the girl earned, prayed for ten hours a day in the courtyard of the Mosque of the Green Tiles. Galische bought her and took her to the little house where he lived beneath the cluster of silver beech trees on the white road from the barracks.

“De Trolle, I wanted that girl. I had an uncon-

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querable longing to get possession of her. I thought that I had been waiting for years and years to meet her, and I went mad when I found that Galische had bought her.

“Every night I would walk out on the sandstretches beyond the white barracks and I would fling myself down on the sand and stare at the little house where she lived with Galische. I thought that my very desire for her would bring her to me. You know what the Arabs say? They say that the little grains of sand talk to each other and that they carry a story for miles and miles. And I, Pierre the Devil, whispered of my love to the hot sand. I babbled nonsense to it, De Trolle. I told the sand of the mystery of her eyes, of the sheen upon her hair, of her red lips that were redder than the poinsettias in the colonel’s garden, of the little teeth that were smaller and whiter than any teeth that I had ever seen. I babbled of her arms, of her little henna-stained fingers, of her shapely feet.

“You wonder how long I acted like this, De Trolle? For three months! Every night for three months I went out there on the sand and stared at the little house and whispered of my love to the hot sand — for three months during which I never spoke a word to her. Galische was too cunning to allow anyone to speak to her.

“That old devil of a wrinkled holy man knew

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that I was there night after night. It was there that he first made me wonder at his power. He found me there one evening when a big white-faced moon hung above the barracks, and when he spoke to me I cursed him.

“‘Would you like to see your end?’ he asked. ‘Would you like to see what Allah has planned for you?’

“‘Begone, you pig!’ I cried, and my eyes were fixed upon the house as I spoke. Each night I craved her more than ever. The desire in my heart grew with each hour that she was in the possession of Galische.

“That toothless devil of an Arab took up a handful of dry sand and lifted his arm.

“‘Look!’ he cried. ‘Look and you will see a picture of the end that Allah plans for you, as the sand drifts between us and the moon!’

“He tossed the sand into the air, De Trolle, and there, between me and the big moon, I saw a fleeting picture of a scaffold with a dead man swinging on a rope. *Sapristi!* that is what I saw! It was like a shadow picture, and it was gone in a second.

“‘It is your end,’ he said. ‘It is what Allah has planned.’

“I flung a knife at him but he dodged away and hobbled swiftly toward the town.

“I did not miss a night, not one. The moment

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the darkness came down upon the desert I would sneak out there and fling myself down on the sand. As far as I knew, that girl did not know of my existence, and yet —”

Pierre the Devil gripped the iron bars and drew himself up till his face was on a level with the face of the absorbed consul. His voice became a hoarse whisper.

“And yet on one moonlit night she came out to me across the sand stretch,” he gasped. “Lying there on the sand I watched her coming. That little house where Galische lived was a quarter of a mile from the spot where I lay each night, but on that evening the desert sands were whitened by a big moon so that I saw her from the moment she left the door. I lay and watched her as she came toward me. I lay and watched her, and my hands clawed the sand as she walked straight toward the spot as if she knew that I was there. As if she knew, De Trolle! Listen, Monsieur Consul! It is desire that brings everything to us. Do you hear? If our longing is great enough, we can bring the world to us. If our longing is big enough, we can bring heaven to our very door. Aye, and hell with it!

“She came across the sand straight toward the spot where I was lying, and when she was within a dozen yards of me she halted. Then I stood up and walked toward her. She stood as straight as a

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Normandy poplar and in the moonlight she looked like something that was not of this world.

“‘Why do you wait and watch?’ she asked.

“‘Because I love,’ I answered.

“‘You are a patient lover,’ she murmured.

“‘Patient because I knew that you would come,’ I answered.

“I was close to her then. I was close enough to see the wonder in her eyes, the eyes that were made to fire men’s souls. I saw the great mass of black hair that fell over her bosom, the hair in which I wanted to bury my face, and I forgot Galische. I forgot everyone. I was Pierre the Devil, and I reached out and took her in my arms.

“It was a low cough that woke me out of the trance that was upon me. That girl pushed me from her and looked over my shoulder. And I turned. Standing not more than six feet away from us was Galische, Lieutenant Henri Galische, who was ten times a bigger devil than I am, De Trolle.

“He could have killed me while my back was turned to him, but he would not. Galische was afraid of no man that ever walked. He was not a coward. Did you ever hear of the affair at Tizi-Ouzou? That was the work of Galische. And the red job in the *souk* at Figuig? Galische again. He was a limb of Satan.

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“‘So,’ he said, glaring at me, ‘it is the little Pierre who is playing tricks on me. I am sorry. I will have to cut the little Pierre into pieces for the kites to eat!’

“ He drew his knife and I drew mine. That girl stepped back to give us room. I hate knives. I hate to kill a man with a knife. A sword, *oui!* A gun, *oui!* But a knife—*sacre!* a knife is a dog’s weapon! But we had only knives and there could be no delay. *Non*, we had to fight. Nothing could stop us then. And as we circled round each other that girl crouched on the sand and watched us. I am wondering, De Trolle, how many thousand women since the world began have crouched as she crouched and watched men fight.

“That was a fight! *Mon Dieu!* yes. Galische was a devil, but to my right arm there came a strength that startled me. Every minute that I had spent on the hot sand staring at that house had added strength to my arm. I fought with the whips of desire urging me on. Upon my lips were the kisses which she had given me, and I laughed like a wolf as I circled round Galische. He was going to cut me into little pieces and feed me to the kites. Me! De Trolle, I could have fought a regiment then. I could have fought a score of the greatest devils that *La Légion* ever enlisted. She knew it. That is why she sat like an image and watched me.

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watched me with her flashing eyes as I closed in on Galische whose temper made him move clumsily over the sand.

“We left Lieutenant Henri Galische there on the white sand, his blood making a stain that looked like a shadow patch when I glanced back after we were two hundred yards away. And it was then that I remembered what that old devil of a holy man had done with the handful of sand, and I shuddered. I thought of that gallows, but the girl kissed me—kissed me on the lips, and I forgot Galische as we turned southward.

“We fled to Saida. From there we went to Moufa. We had to keep moving, De Trolle. The arm of France is long. *Oui*, it is long. They wanted me. They wanted me for the murder of Galische. The sand that had told the girl of my love told them that I had committed the crime. And one must move swiftly to escape the clutch of the legionaries.

“We moved on and on. And then during those first days of flight I knew that that old dog of a holy man was helping the bloodhounds. He had been robbed of his monthly income which Galische paid him, and he sent out the desert marconigrams that brought the arm of France reaching after us across the desert.

“It was the old wrinkled holy man who brought

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the legionaries on me at Naama. They caught me one night as we slept in the house of a coppersmith in the *souk*. The holy man was there to see the capture. They dragged me out at dawn and they started with me back to Sidi-Bel-Abbès. The arm of France is far-reaching and like the tentacle of an octopus. When it twists itself around its victim, it brings him with all speed to the spot where he must suffer.

“That girl ran after me as we rode into the desert, out of which the hot sun leapt as if anxious to light the path that led me back to the gallows. And as they flogged my camel and jeered at me because they had caught me while I slept, I twisted my head and stared at her as she followed. She was running, De Trolle, running after me across the hot sand and behind her hobbled the holy man. *Dieu!* I went mad as I looked! My muscles swelled until the cords cut through my skin and the blood ran down my arms and chest. As I looked, I saw her fall and I saw him hobble faster to catch up with her. When his claws were reaching out to her, something happened to my eyes and I could see nothing but a red mist—a red mist of murder!

“That night I strangled the man who had jeered at me most during the day. Lying in the darkness I strained and strained till I burst the thongs of green hide that bound me, and I had my fingers on

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his windpipe before he knew what had made the little clicking sound when the bonds snapped.

“I killed him like I would kill a rat. I crept out of the camp, stole the fastest camel and rode back to Naama. I went up and down the *souk* hunting for information. They told me where that old man had taken her, and I crept into the house with a knife in my hand. He escaped me, De Trolle. My blade slashed his dirty robe as he dashed down an alley at the back of the *souk*. And she helped to save his life. Her arms were round my neck and her lips were clinging to mine as I tried to chase the old hound who wanted to send me to that gallows that he had pictured with the handful of sand which he tossed into the air. He ran faster that night than he ever ran in his life.

“Those bloodhounds of France unnerved me. I took her that night and we went northward across the desert. We rode up across the great sandy stretches to Chellala, and from there to Boghar. Ours was a great love, De Trolle. I wanted her and she wanted me. Galische was a thing which Destiny had put between us and I had put him out of the way. Yet France could not see it in that light. They wanted to tear me away from that woman that I loved with all my body and soul.

“I came up to Dellys and from there we took ship back to Algiers. We lived there in the Arab

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Kasbah, hiding like rats in a hole, and then we came on to Tripoli and from there to Alexandria.

“I cursed my reputation as we fled. Her beauty I could cover, but I could not hide my own face. A veil hid her red lips and pearly teeth and the strange beauty of her blazing eyes, but I was Pierre Lepre, Pierre the Devil, out of whose way men dodged. A bumboat man at Tripoli knew me and he tried to sell my head at a price. Look! He gave me this little memento in exchange for what I gave him.”

The sick man pulled up the linen sleeve that covered his muscular arm. Across the magnificent biceps was a terrible scar some eighteen inches in length, and De Trolle shuddered as he looked at it. Pierre the Devil was well-named!

“I went mad with fear. I was not afraid to die. I had never been afraid of death, but I did not want them to drag me from her whom I loved. And always before me was the shadow picture which that old dog of a marabout pictured for me when he flung the handful of sand into the air as I lay on the white waste watching the house beneath the silver beech trees at Sidi-Bel-Abbès.

“Do you know that I became afraid of the shadow picture, De Trolle? It haunted me. *Oui!* It came to me in my sleep. I saw myself dancing on air for the murder of Galische! I began to be afraid

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of every man who looked at me. I, Pierre Lepre, who had faced Galische with a laugh when he came at me; Galische whose hands were red with blood that ran at Tizi-Ouzou and at Figuig!"

Pierre Lepre paused to examine the face of the consul. De Trolle was watching the light in the eyes of the *ex-légionnaire*. Although not an imaginative man, he understood what Lepre had suffered during that pursuit.

"Now I must tell you of something else," continued the sick man. "I had a strange feeling as we fled from place to place, De Trolle. I fancied that I could tell in what direction that old wrinkled holy man who sold that girl to Galische was coming. Do you understand?"

"I felt that he was always upon my heels and that I had been given some peculiar power which told me the direction that he was coming from. It was strange. It was very strange. Sometimes in the morning, sometimes in the hot noons, and again in the velvety nights I would feel a cold breath which came to me from some point of the compass and I would fly in the opposite direction.

"Afterwards I proved that this was no fancy, De Trolle. Days, weeks after I had that first belief regarding the direction he was coming in, I proved to my own satisfaction that it was not a foolish fancy on my part. I took notice of these peculiar

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warnings that came to me. I would run like a jackal whenever I felt that cold breath which told me he was coming. I knew that those premonitions were right. No matter where we were, no matter how secure I thought we were, I would take the girl by the arm and run. Sometimes I would spring up in the night, feeling certain that he was close to me, certain that his clawlike fingers were reaching out to hand me over to the jeering legionaries that I knew were still after us. The arm of France is long, De Trolle. I have been part of that arm when it went out after others, and I knew. This Africa is big, but it is not big enough to hide a soldier who has put a knife into the heart of a lieutenant.

“Fear drove us out into the desert. We went out over the great sand-stretches far to the west. Out there, De Trolle, where the red sun is diving into the sand like a newly minted *louis*.”

Lepre nodded toward the little window of his bedroom. The sun was flaming down the western sky, bathing the dunes in a flood of crimson.

“We fled out into the wastes to a little oasis miles away from Shual, and there she died. She died. What of? you ask. She died in childbirth, De Trolle. The Arab woman came too late, and—and she died. Mother of Mary!—she died. She gave a little sigh, looked at me with her wonderful eyes, kissed me on the lips once and died. It was hard,

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De Trolle. If I had been close to some place where I could have got a doctor I could have saved her, but I was miles away from a doctor. I had been driven out into the desert by that old fiend and the arm of France.

“Now I am going to tell you of the miracle. As I stood there at the door of the tent looking toward the east, there came to me that cold feeling of danger which I always felt when the old wrinkled holy man was close to me. It came to me then as I stood there with her lying dead upon the little bed. It came to me out of the east and I laughed as I felt it. I walked back to her, kissed her dead lips and started out in the direction from which I felt sure he was coming. I was not afraid of him then. She was dead. She would not have to run after me across the desert when the legionaries started to drag me back to Sidi-Bel-Abbès. I was Pierre Lepre again, the Pierre Lepre that had faced Galische. I knew no fear on that night.

“A jackal howled out on the desert, and I howled back at him. I was an animal. I was a wolf, a wolf thirsting for blood. I howled as I ran, and I chanted the mad blood song that the hill tribes of the Sagheru mountains chant as they charge down the slopes. Have you ever felt like that, De Trolle? You have not! My fingers ached to grip the throat of an enemy, and I ran across the sands feeling

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certain that coming toward me was a person I hated more than the devil himself."

Pierre Lepre paused for a few moments and gazed at his brown muscular fingers that crooked themselves as if to show the consul how they looked on that night of which Lepre spoke. The shadows of late afternoon invaded the Hospital of The White Nuns. The night started to spin its cobwebs of gloom in the corners of the little room.

"Are you tired?" asked Lepre. "Are you tired of my story?"

"*Non, non!*" cried the consul. "I am wondering what happened."

The door of the bedroom opened softly as the consul answered the question put by Lepre, and the white face of the nursing sister looked into the room. Pierre Lepre's sharp eyes noticed her before she could draw back.

"You may come in, sister," he said quietly. "You can hear the rest of the story that I am telling to our good friend, the consul. I—I told him much that I would not like you to hear, but this which I am going to tell is the story of a miracle and it will not offend. It will explain why I was found in the desert five days' march from here and brought to this little hospital of peace to die."

The soft-footed sister entered the room and closed the door. She put pillows at the back of

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Pierre Lepre to rest his shoulders and she stood behind him as he continued his story.

“It was a moonlight night. A big scared-looking moon had come up in a hurry out of the sands, a moon that looked as if afraid of what it might see. I ran on and on toward the east, ran like a bloodhound that scents its quarry. And as I ran I knew that the quarry was close. My fingers felt that they were already upon the wrinkled throat of the old man.

“Up out of the sand-stretches he came at last. I saw him with his hands outstretched as I saw him that morning when his grasping fingers reached out after the girl who tried to follow me when I was taken a prisoner from Naama. He was stumbling across the sands toward me, and I howled with delight as I caught sight of him. I had a desire to kill him, to break every little bone in his body, to tear him in pieces. The blood pounded in my head till the thumping of my arteries reminded me of the thud-thud of the condensing engine near the parade-ground at Sidi-Bel-Abbès.

“He turned when he saw me, turned and tried to run. *Dieu!* I was on him in three leaps. I sprang upon his shoulders like a wolf and hurled him to the ground. I had him at last. But I had to drag my fingers away from his wrinkled throat. I did not want to kill him in a hurry. *Non,* I wanted to

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make him suffer for a little while the damnable torment that I had suffered as I fled before him. She was dead, and all the bottled hate of weeks flooded my brain and made me mad.

“I think he fainted with fear when my fingers were at his throat. I know he could not speak when I dragged him into a sitting position and started to tell him what he had done. I started to tell that old fiend the torment he had brought to that girl and myself in his efforts to get her back to earn for him a few paltry francs which someone else like Galische would have willingly handed over. I screamed to him as he mumbled prayers in his beard. He knew that I was going to kill him. Ay, he knew! His old snake-like eyes, that glittered like the eyes of a horned viper, saw Death stalking toward him across the desert. He pleaded with me. He prayed to me. His teeth chattered as I held him with one hand and pinched his throat with my fingers, pinched him daintily with my fingers.

“‘Now,’ I cried, ‘now where is the gallows?’

“‘I was wrong,’ he muttered. ‘I was wrong. You will not die by the gallows.’

“‘And how will I die?’ I cried.

“‘Allah knows,’ he muttered. ‘Allah alone knows. Blessed be Allah!’

“I held him there wondering which would be the best method to kill him by. I wanted to get every

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thrill I could from his death. I did. It was joy to me to hear him mumbling prayers and pleading to me as my fingers burrowed into his flesh. And it was while I pondered over the manner in which I should kill him that I asked him a question. *Sacre!* What a fool I was! I cursed myself for asking him that question. A million times have I cursed myself. Ay, with my fingers on his throat I questioned him about that trick with the handful of sand which he had played on me at Sidi-Bel-Abbès.

“‘How is it done?’ I asked.

“‘The sand knows everything,’ he mumbled. ‘Upon the sand are the shadows of everything that has ever passed over it.’

“‘Is that so?’ I questioned.

“‘Ay, it is so,’ he answered. ‘Allah has willed it. Here across this desert a million feet have passed, and the sands still hold the shadows of those people.’

“I looked at him and I looked at the bare sands. A madness was on me then, a madness to find out how he worked his deviltry. I should have choked him without listening to him, but I was a fool. I, Pierre Lepre, was a fool!

“‘Show me!’ I cried. ‘By the beard of Mohammed, if it is not true I will throttle you without letting you speak another word!’”

Pierre Lepre stopped and drew a great breath into his lungs. The consul was leaning toward him, his

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eyes fixed upon the face of the story teller. The white hand of the nun supported the shoulders of the sick man.

“Now I will tell you of the miracle,” said Lepre, speaking in a tense whisper. “Now I will tell you what that wrinkled fiend did out there in the desert. I am dying, and I must tell it before I die. He scooped up sand with his withered fingers and tossed that sand up against the big scared-looking moon that was watching us. He tossed it up in a shower and I saw. *Mere de Dieu!* I saw! He said that the shadows of everything that had passed that way had fallen upon the sand and could be seen again when he flung the sand up against the big moon. He was right. I am dying, De Trolle, and I would not let my last words be false. I would not. There, as he tossed up handful after handful of the desert sand, I saw shadow pictures of those that had passed that way through the centuries!

“Do you think I am mad? *Non*, you do not! I am sane! I am as sane as you or this good nun who has been kind to me. My brain is clearer today than it has been for months and months, and I am telling you the truth.

“North and south across that desert they passed, and I saw them. I saw them, De Trolle! Swordsmen and spearmen, traders and archers! Caravans of endless length. I saw them go by, saw them go

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by as I crouched on the sand and watched with fear in my eyes! I saw black-shawled men that I think must have been the shawled butchers of Feerish of the Bloody Face. I saw them! They rode at a gallop, their swords held high. *Wow!* what a sight it was! I saw a brigade on swift-running Bisharin camels, a brigade that must have passed that way three thousand years before. Never have I seen such camels as those lean-flanked Bisharins.

“Have you ever seen a moving shadow upon a white blind? Well, that procession was something like that. There was an endless procession of camels, traders, fighting men, slaves, pilgrims, everything. That wizard knew that he was prolonging his life by throwing up those pictures before my eyes and he worked magic as he had never worked it before. He had felt the grip of my fingers on his wind-pipe and he clawed at the sand and tossed it up so that it fell in an endless shower between me and the big moon, an endless shower of which, in falling, showed me the pictures of the past and chilled my blood as I watched.

“Are you listening, De Trolle? He flung up those pictures for five minutes, ten, fifteen, and I watched like a crazy man. I saw sights that took my breath, sights that made me crouch in fear! Magic? What kind of magic? Tell me, De Trolle? Tell me what kind of magic he possessed to throw

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up before me a shadow picture of spearmen with the great big-shanked spears of a long-dead past. There were Syrian bow-men, long lean swarthy brutes, and tall brown men armed with Damascus blades that would take a giant to handle. What kind of magic did he possess to make me see all these things? What kind of magic, De Trolle?"

The fingers of Pierre Lepre reached out and gripped the shoulder of the consul. The white-faced nun lowered her head as if she was afraid that she would miss a word of the strange story. There was a tensivity in his voice that made his two listeners feel certain that the climax was near.

"It was then that I saw the great wonder," continued the sick man, speaking in a whisper that was so low that the nun's face was close to his as he spoke. "*It was then—it was then that I saw God!*"

The white-faced sister gave a little cry of fear and put her two hands together. De Trolle, leaning forward, forgot the pain which the iron fingers of Lepre caused him as they clutched his shoulder.

"In my little room at Dijon when I was a boy," whispered the sick man, "there was a picture, a little picture that hung above my cot. It was a picture of a woman and a child riding upon a donkey with a man walking by their side. It hung above my cot from the days of early childhood. It was the

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first picture that I ever remember seeing. I would look at it each night as I said my prayers before going to bed, and I would look at it each morning when I said the ‘Our Father’ on awakening. I remember on the night when I packed my little bundle and ran away to become a drummer boy, that picture held me for a moment before I jumped out of the window into the rose garden at the back of the house. That picture was called the ‘Flight into Egypt.’”

De Trolle moistened his lips and gave a low gasp of wonder. The face of the nun was whiter than her spotless linen habit.

Pierre Lepre continued. “They came before my eyes like a fleeting shadow,” he whispered. “Out of the north they came, the woman and the child upon the donkey, the man hurrying by their side. They were alone, moving southward swiftly, ever so swiftly. I gave a cry of astonishment as I saw them. I thrust out my head and stared, stared like a madman. By the bones of great St. Pierre of Avignon who is my patron saint, I was stunned by the sight! I forgot the wrinkled devil that I wanted to kill. I let go of his throat and thrust my hands out to those three and cried out as they passed hurriedly. I cried out to them. I screamed at them! I got upon my feet and staggered after them like a drunken man as they fled southward.

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“They had their backs turned to me, their backs, mind you! In the little picture over my cot at Dijon, the face of the child looked down on me, and there — there out on that desert, I, Pierre the Devil, who had not thought of that picture for a score of years, wanted to see the face of that child turned to me as I had seen it in the dream days of childhood. Do you understand me, De Trolle? Do you understand what I mean? I wanted to look at his face, to look at the face that I had watched as I whispered my childish prayers beside the little cot in my mother’s home. I forgot that wrinkled wretch I had sworn to kill. I forgot her who lay dead. I forgot everything. I was lifted out of myself and I ran like a madman across the desert after a shadow, De Trolle. I ran after a shadow that had overwhelmed me with a million memories of childhood, memories that made me see that I was filthy and unclean in the sight of God!”

The startled nun put her arms around the shoulders of the dying man. The story had told upon the strength of Pierre Lepre. For full three minutes he remained gasping, unable to proceed, then once again he took up his wonder tale.

“I ran on and on,” he gasped. “I pursued them over the white sands. I screamed out to them. I screamed out to them as they fled. They would not stop! They fled from me! They fled from me,

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Pierre Lepre, because—because I was a devil who had robbed and plundered and—and killed. I had killed the *légionnaire* who jeered at me at Naama and I had killed Galische and others! My hands—these hands—have killed, and—and those three would not look. Do you hear me? They would not look, although—although in the little picture above my cot at Dijon He—He was always looking down upon me!”

Pierre the Devil fell back exhausted upon the bed. He had screamed out the last words of his story as if he wished every person in that silent hospital to hear what he had to say. The consul was on his feet now. The soft-voiced nun had her cool fingers upon the heated brow of the *ex-légionnaire*. She was whispering to him, and Lepre, with his eyes upon her, listened.

“What did you say?” he breathed.

“He never runs away from anyone who seeks Him,” murmured the nun. “He never turns His head from those who are sorry for their sins.”

“But He turned His head from me!” gasped the dying man. “He turned His face from me! I followed for hours. For hours, I tell you! I ran on and on till I fell exhausted. I fell exhausted and I lay there for three days before they found me and brought me here, but He—He turned His head away from me because—because I had the

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blood of Galische and a dozen others upon my hands!"

"But He never turns His head away from those who are sorry," repeated the sister softly.

"I am sorry," whispered Pierre Lepre. "But it is too late." The faint tones strengthened with agony.

The nun made a sudden gesture to De Trolle and stole from the room. Pierre the Devil lay breathing painfully in the silence. Then the door opened and the nun slipped in. She carried a small framed print of the "Flight into Egypt."

Death was close to Pierre Lepre. De Trolle, bending over him, saw that the flashing insolence had left the black eyes. The nostrils of the nose looked pinched.

As the nun came to the bedside, Pierre Lepre spoke.

"I am sorry," he said again.

"Then He will turn to you," murmured the sister. "He will turn to you with forgiveness in His eyes."

"It is too late," gasped Pierre the Devil.

"No!" cried the little nun with fervor. "He will turn His face to all who are sorry. He did not turn His face from you. Ah no, you are mistaken. You are His child now just the same as when you slept in your little cot at Dijon. He is looking at you now. See! He has forgiven you!"

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The nun and consul bent over Pierre Lepre and the nun held the picture before his dying eyes. The level sun rays struck through the window and made the picture luminous. To the two who leaned above the little cot it seemed as if the face of the adventurer underwent a marvelous change. All the fighting deviltry seemed to be gradually swept away by a smile of joy.

"Say it again," murmured the dying man.

"You are His child," murmured the nun. "You are His child now as well as when you lived with your good mother at Dijon."

The last moments had come to the dying man. The lips of the white-faced nun were moving softly, ever so softly, and the consul's straining ears caught the prayer which she murmured. And he repeated that prayer with her. Softly, ever so softly, the nun and the consul repeated the prayer for the dying.

The shadows in the corner of the room increased. The silence of the desert came over the Hospital of The White Nuns, a strange silence that throttled the slightest noise. But the two watchers repeated the prayers and, as they watched the sick man, the lips of Pierre Lepre moved softly as if there had come to him in the last few moments of life a boyhood prayer which he had forgotten for years and years.

The white-faced nun lowered her head after

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many minutes. The lips of Pierre Lepre were still. The calm of death was upon his face. Gently the nun folded his arms upon his broad chest. Her eyes were moist as she turned to the consul.

“He is with God,” she said softly.

*The Black Horsemen of Mir
Jehal*

VIII

THE BLACK HORSEMEN OF MIR JEHAL

HOCHDORF, the German naturalist, sat in his big chair upon the veranda of the lonely bungalow, and peered at the narrow path that showed faintly in the gloom. A female monkey within the house was scolding her offspring, and the ceaseless chatter flowed out into the tropical dusk, a thin trickle of noise that was sucked up by the silence of the encompassing jungle. Down from Asia rolled the night, thick and oppressive, and the massed trees conjured up a vision of many-limbed giants assisting at some mysterious ceremony.

Presently Hochdorf spoke. "I am ten times a big fool," he growled. "I had a letter that I wanted Gung to take down the river to Brechmann, and I forgot to give it to him."

Gung, the Malay with the withered arm, had left the bungalow some twenty minutes before Hochdorf spoke, and it was reasonable to suppose that he had placed considerable distance between himself and the home of the naturalist.

"I suppose he would not hear us if we ran down to the river and shouted?" I questioned.

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"No, no!" snapped the German. "He is out of hearing by this. There is only one chance of his coming back: he might feel that I want him."

The mother monkey stopped her chatter at that moment, and the night seemed to be relieved. One pictured that noise as something that was wounding the all-embracing quiet. Jungle and sky were one, a soft, deep black, and as I tried to make out the path down which the Malay had gone, my mental gizzard asked for some solvent to help along the digestion of the naturalist's remark. He had coolly stated that Gung might "feel" that he was wanted, and the observation puzzled me.

"Why, what do you mean?" I asked. "How will he know?"

"I said that he might feel that I wanted him," said Hochdorf quietly. "Gung has got a marvelous skin. *Ach!* yes. He can feel things like a stalking leopard. I do not know how. I can only say what I think, and I do not want to be asked for proofs. I hate to give proofs. This jungle is not a court of law."

He spoke irritably and I made no comment. When Hochdorf was in an ill humor it was wise to remain silent. And as we sat without speaking, the oppressive quiet of the place became more apparent. The silence seemed to rear up, a menacing, palpable thing that was ready to pounce down upon

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human being or animal that dared to make a sound.

But the sound came. From the direction of the river came the faint *plut plut* of bare feet; the rough steps creaked, and someone halted upon the veranda. Hochdorf struck a match, and the light revealed Gung, his withered arm hanging loosely by his side.

He stood without moving, his brown body, with its *chawat* of bark cloth, fitting in with the background. The jungle was old, old as the Blue Rocks of Bintulu, and the brown figure that had rippled the dark seemed part of it.

Hochdorf broke the silence. He drew himself out of the depths of the big chair and spoke in an even, quiet voice. "There is a note on the table that you must take down the river to Brechmann," he said. "I forgot to give it to you before you left."

The Malay gave a grunt and moved towards the door of the bungalow. A slush lamp faintly illuminated the big room that was filled with specimens. Near the door the native turned and spoke.

"I had some nuts for the black monkey," he said, speaking in his own tongue. "I forgot to give them to her, so I came back."

Hochdorf sank back in his chair without making any comment. Gung picked up the note, put a handful of nuts upon the pine table and faded

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swiftly into the darkness. The *plut plut* of his feet became one with the soft breathing of the jungle.

For a long time the naturalist remained silent; then he spoke.

“He said that he came back to bring nuts to the black monkey,” he growled. “Perhaps he did. I do not know. Sometimes I think that the greatest *savant* that ever came out of Leipsic is a child compared with Gung—that is, on some things. Listen, and I will tell you something. It concerns Gung. *Ja*. It concerns him very much.

“Ten years ago I was on the Rejang River at a place that the *lieber Gott* made when he was in a temper; and to that place came a man named Herriott and his wife. They were Americans who had come across Balabac Strait from Palawan. It was not a nice place to bring a woman to, but Herriott’s wife did not seem to mind. There are times in the lives of some of us when the big centers of the world do not look as nice as these spots on the outer rim. And the Rejang River did not seem lonely to Herriott and his wife. Not a bit of it! They loved each other with a love that was big, and where love is, there is no room for loneliness. This world is mighty small for lovers. They can look over space from their little hills of bliss. They can see Teheran on one side and see Papeete at the other, and they think a crowd is a big nuisance.

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“Herriott was a big man in a place like this. I gave him work collecting specimens, and he was a mighty good collector. The fault with nine men out of ten in this infernal archipelago is their unreliability, but Herriott was different. He had no desire to rush away to the big spots, and he would do things that he was told to do.

“They had been here about seven months when I sent him up the river on a trip to get some specimens that I wanted, and he had been gone three days when his wife rushed into my bungalow screaming like mad. *Gott!* didn’t she scream!

“‘What is wrong?’ I roared. ‘Quick! Tell me!’

“‘Clinton!’ she shrieked. Clinton was the first name of her husband, and when she said it she looked as if she had seen his ghost.

“‘What is wrong with him?’ I asked. And I wondered how she could have got any word of him when he was away in the jungle.

“‘He is in danger!’ she screamed, and when she had said that, she fell down in a faint.

“It was an hour before I could get at the bottom of that business. Do you know what had startled her? One of the Malays had seen a strange white man going up the river, and the native had told her. That was all. Her husband was up the river, too. Do you see? She felt danger. *Ja*. I did not know

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their history. This is not the place to cross examine anyone about his past, but that woman's fear was not nice to see. It was the essence of fear. All my arguments did nothing. A white man, who was a stranger to the natives, had been seen going up the river, and Herriott was up the river. I tried to prove to her that it was some trapper that we knew, but she brought Gung, and Gung said that the man was a stranger. So it was no use arguing. I had to go out and hunt for her husband or sit still and watch her going from one hysterical fit into another, and she was so good at that business that I thought it would be better to hunt for Herriott.

“That woman would insist on coming with me, and that made more trouble. Taking a woman to her husband in this jungle is not like taking her from Wall Street to Harlem in one of those burrows that you have over there in the United States. *Nein*. That place on the Rejang River was a little annex to Sheol. You bet it was. I was as mad as a hungry cobra when I ordered the Dyaks to get out the boat, and she crying for her Clinton all the time they were getting it ready. I thought it was a nice piece of foolishness, and I damned Gung for telling her that he had met a stranger.

“‘Why did you tell her about the man?’ I asked.

“‘I do not know,’ he snarled. ‘I just told her and that is all.’

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“Well, we started up the river in pursuit of Herriott, and I was just bubbling with temper all the time. Six Dyaks, Gung, Mrs. Herriott and myself were in the boat — nine of us, and we were starting out to bring a man back from a collecting trip simply because his wife had got a nervous feeling about his safety! It was enough to irritate any man, was it not? Though sometimes when I was swearing quietly to myself I would look at that woman, and I would see again the terror in her eyes that I had noticed when she rushed into the bungalow. Once or twice I had seen terror like that, and it puzzled me to see it then. That fool Gung saw the fear too — you bet he did. When the Dyaks loafed, he walloped them with the flat of his oar, and all through the next three days we pulled up the Rejang, fighting our way through the nipa-palm growths in a heat that made us gasp.

“We found out something in those three days. *Ja*. That strange man that Gung had seen was no one that I knew. He was not. The few men that were within a hundred miles of my camp were collectors and naturalists, but this man was neither. I was certain of that. The natives told me that they had shown him everything they had, but he was not interested. He wanted to keep right on. He had evidently something more attractive in sight than specimens, and that puzzled me some. I kept

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the result of my inquiries to myself, but that woman read the look of wonder on my face. The more I questioned the Dyaks about the matter, the more she urged haste, and the more that fool Gung walloped the boatmen when he looked at the terror in her eyes. I felt that there was a mystery in the business, but it was not for me to ask her questions about the reasons why a strange man should be hunting for her husband. *Nein*. I told you that it is a fool's business to question people who get out on the fringe of the earth. There are a lot of people in this infernal archipelago who chopped their family tree down the day they started for these islands. You can gamble mighty heavy on that.

“On the fourth day we got out of the boat and found the trail of Herriott and the Kling guide that was with him, and we followed that trail into the jungle. And we found something else that made me mighty mad with the look of things. Yes, mighty mad! We found that someone else had followed that trail, and that someone had shoes on. Of course that proved that the trailer was not a native, and that was news that upset my digestion.

“I did not tell the woman about the follower. Not much! She was nearly crazy with the danger that her instinct told her of, and I did not wish to send her clean off her head by telling her of the marks of the other pair of shoes. A woman is

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a mighty unreasonable person, and I was sick of the hysterical stunts that she had played at my bungalow.

“On the afternoon of the fifth day we lost Herriott’s track, and that was unfortunate. Somehow we had got away from it in a swamp patch where the black mud was so soft that it had filled up the tracks of himself and the Kling the moment they passed, and I got sick when I found that we could not find that trail again. That woman was mighty near insane with fear just then. *Mein Gott!* yes! Her nervousness about her husband’s safety was getting bigger with each step that she took through that place, and she was all to pieces. I could not say anything that would do her good. Not a thing! She felt that the danger to Herriott was big, and when I thought of those shoe prints I felt that she was right. But we could not find the trail, and we floundered about like fools. When the night came down upon us I was thinking that the best thing we could do was to make for the Rejang in the hope that Herriott would turn back, but I knew that the woman would never agree to return. Now I am going to tell you about Gung. I said that the greatest *savant* that ever came out of Leipsic would be a fool to him on some things. And it is true.

“We camped that evening in the thickest bit of that infernal jungle. The trees wedged themselves

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around us like the big grenadiers at Potsdam, and the lianas hung from limbs like the cobwebs of spiders. It was a nasty place. We managed to light a fire to keep off the sweaty dampness, and we were huddled around that fire when something happened to Gung. *Ja*. Something happened to Gung! Do you think that he came back here tonight to bring the nuts to the black monkey? Perhaps he did. I do not know. This is Borneo, and just when a man thinks that he knows something he finds that the bottom has been torn out of his knowledge knapsack, and that everything has fallen out.

"But to get back to Gung: He was sitting on his hams near the fire, and all of a sudden he pushed his head slowly forward and stared at the darkness as if he had seen the three-headed specter of Bak Trang. Have you ever seen a man look at a little square of blackness with his eyes popping out? It gives you a funny sensation, does it not? Well, Gung stared at the night as I had never seen anyone stare before. It is a fact. He stared at it as if he was trying to see something up in Singapore, five hundred miles away. He looked so hard that the Dyaks who were busy blowing the fire, and who had their backs turned to him, felt that he was doing something out of the common, and they lifted their heads to look at him. Shades of Friedrich Heinrich Humboldt — didn't he stare!

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"It was quite a minute before I was able to fire a question at that idiot, but when I got my voice I fired one mighty loud. The way he was looking at the dark, and the way he was gurgling, gave me cold chills.

"*'Gott in Himmel!'* I roared. 'What is the matter with you?'

"*'Wah!'* he groaned. '*Wah!*' He groaned just like a sick *orang-outang*.

"*'Speak!'* I shouted. '*Speak!*' I was that angry that I reached over and grabbed him by the neck and shook him till the shark teeth on his bracelets played a tune.

"I did not like the look on his face. I could not stand it. Not much! A little of that kind of poppy show went a mighty long way with me, and I could see that the woman and the six Dyaks had seventeen different kinds of nightmare from the stare that he was sending into the black patches between the *kaladang* trees.

"*'I will choke you if you do not speak!'* I yelled. 'Tell me, Gung! Tell me!'

"He opened his mouth and shut it again; he could not get words. He wet his lips and tried again.

"*'The Black Horsemen!'* he moaned. '*The Black Horsemen of Mir Jehal!*'

"I have never been as frightened as I was at that moment. Never! I have been in a few tight cor-

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ners in my time, but I have never experienced the same kind of fear as the fear that gripped me then. It was devilish fear. It seemed to me that a million cold hands were reaching out of the darkness to choke me. That is a fact. It might seem funny when I tell it to you now, but to me at that moment — *Ach!* I am sick now when I look back and think how I felt as I watched him.

“Herriott’s wife and those six Dyaks had the squirming feeling mighty bad, too. And it was no wonder. The look on Gung’s face would cool one’s blood quicker than an ice chamber. I have never seen a man look like he did at that moment. And he looked at nothing, mind you. Nothing!

“The woman sprang to her feet and stared at the trees, and those six Dyaks did the same. Those natives had heard something of those Horsemen that Gung had mentioned. This East is a peculiar place. These people have mystery in their blood, and the very look on the Malay’s face told that half-dozen more than you and I could read out of a book in a month.

“‘Where are the Horsemen?’ I stammered. ‘Where are they?’ It was stupid to ask a fool question like that, but that little incident had stampeded my wits.

“‘They are going by,’ whispered Gung. ‘They are passing by over there.’

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“He spoke in the dialect, and he pointed into the thickest bit of that darkness as he spoke. And it was like looking into a pot of ink to stare at that patch. *Himmel!* Yes! All I could hear was the jungle breathing as it is breathing now, with every minute or so one of those queer little puffs of wind that seemed to say ‘Ssh!’ as it slipped through the leaves.

“Herriott’s wife clutched me by the arm, and the six Dyaks huddled together. We had little chills running races up and down our spines just then. Gung was still doing the pop-eyed stunt, and he was doing it with all the energy he had to spare.

“‘What does he see?’ gasped Herriott’s wife. ‘Tell me!’

“‘I do not know,’ I said. ‘I have heard much, but I know little.’ I was mighty mad with the woman and with Gung and with everything.

“That Malay was squatting on his hams, quivering like a monkey when a snake is climbing up the limb of the tree it is sitting on, and he was listening with all his body. Not with his ears, mind you. He was straining the night with his skin. I would like to have a model of him in plaster as he sat there that night—that is, if a sculptor could put the feeling into it. It could be exhibited as something typical of this old world out here.

“Those six Dyaks had shuffled round till they

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had their backs to each other, and their faces turned towards the night. They could not see or hear anything, but they were satisfied with the look on Gung's face. They read that look. Their ancestors must have looked like that when the ghost *mias* that the Kyans speak of, the big white *orang-outang* that has lived a thousand years, came crashing through the branches of the *tapang* trees.

"'Oh, what does he hear?' cried Herriott's wife. 'What horsemen are passing?'

"'He says that he hears The Black Horsemen,' I stammered, and I kept my eyes on Gung as I spoke to her. I had heard something of those same Horsemen, but I had kept what I heard to myself. It is stupid to talk of everything that you hear in a place like this. It is only the people with the sensitive cuticle that can believe properly. I would just as soon tell this story to some people as I would tell it to Jan Winklekop, who ran the little beer house in the Kaiserplatz at Frankfurt. And Jan Winklekop was as deaf as the statue of Friedrich Wilhelm.

"Gung's muscles relaxed when I answered Herriott's *frau*, and he looked up at us with a curious expression on his face. He looked as if he had been hit with a sandbag.

"'Tell me!' shrieked the woman. 'Tell me what you heard!'

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“‘I heard The Black Horsemen,’ whispered Gung. ‘They passed by in the trees over there.’”

“‘I tell you that the mystery that the Malay put into his answer took the breath from that woman. It took the breath from me, too. I have heard people say things, and the tone of their voice has given their assertions the lie, but with Gung—*Ach!* when he said that I got gooseflesh all over my body.”

“‘But what are they?’ gurgled the woman.

“‘They are the appointed of Buddha,’ breathed Gung. ‘They collect the souls of the dead!’”

“That was a nice thing to tell to that woman, was it not? She was thinking of her husband and the danger he was in, and that fool Malay informs her in a whisper that The Black Horsemen of Mir Jehal, that had just ridden by, are Buddha’s messengers whose duty it is to collect the souls of the dead! It was terrible. I tried to kick that native so that he would hold his tongue, but the woman pushed me away.

“‘I want to know!’ she screamed. ‘I must know!’”

“And that idiot Gung was only too ready to tell her. His breath had been shut off so long with the horror that had pinched his windpipe, that he wanted to see if he had got his speech back. That was the case. And the woman was crazy with fear

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as she listened to him. There is no fear like the fear that comes from the things that you cannot see, and we were getting some of that just then.

“Have you ever heard of The Black Horsemen of Mir Jehal? You have not? That is strange. You can hear of them from the gates of Kandahar to Bangkok, and from Cape Comorin to the Lanak Pass. I had heard the story before that night, but it had never impressed me as it impressed me then. My, no! It bit into my body like acid when Gung started to tell it to Herriott’s wife in that jungle. It made my hair prickle. Right in the middle of the telling, a wet branch of a cinnamon tree touched my neck, and I, Hermann Hochdorf, who has lived in this jungle till I have become a part of it—I felt inclined to yell out with terror.

“Gung was the devil of a story-teller. He was an expert. Your Oriental can put in all the little shivery business that is beyond our art. He told that yarn in a way that hit her in the emotional solar plexus. And it was a terrible story. He told her how The Black Horsemen of Mir Jehal were the greatest butchers that India had ever known. They had made rivers out of the blood they had spilled. They were devils for slaughter. Down from the Karakoram Hills they had swept through Kashmir into the Punjab, and men, women, and children were killed without any cause. They

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slashed and hacked with their crooked swords, and they galloped down the fugitives that tried to get away from them. They were fiends. The Red Butchers of Zafir Khan and the bodyguard of Tamerlane were so many greenhorns compared to Mir Jehal's batch—that is, if Gung's story was a true one. As he told it, he jumped from pigeon English into the Malay dialect, and from the Malay into the lingo of the Bugis, but the woman followed him. It was not hard to follow him. He was a master of all that fool wriggling business that Frenchman do when they are telling a story. He was telling half of it with his shoulders and eyes, and half with his tongue.

“Then that Malay told what happened to The Black Horsemen. They fell in with a bunch of Pathans at Kabul River, and those Pathans were some fighters. You bet they were. They were big, hairy devils that would have taken on a batch from Sheol, and they went for Mir Jehal's batch like hungry leopards at a bunch of mountain goats. I would have liked to see that fight. It must have been something like the charge of the cavalry of Prince Friederich Charles at Froschweiler. *Himmel!* Yes! Those Pathans had a blood thirst that did not cool till the last one of The Black Horsemen was wiped out. The Pathans didn't leave a single one of them to tell the story, so Gung said.

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"The imagination of the East got busy after that little happening. A Yogi of Benares had a vision, and he must have had a newspaper man's eye for something sensational. *Ja*. In his dream he saw the Death Angel standing in front of Buddha, and he listened to the conversation.

"'What can I do for you?' asked Buddha.

"'You can give me a rest,' said the Death Angel. 'I have grown weary collecting the souls of those that The Black Horsemen of Mir Jehal have butchered.'

"'And who will fill your place?' asked Buddha.

"'Give the work to The Black Horsemen now that they are dead,' answered the Death Angel. 'Let them go out and collect the souls of the dead, because it has been their butchereries that have made me tired.'

"Buddha saw the wisdom of the argument, according to the Yogi, and he gave the Death Angel's job to The Black Horsemen for all time. Now you will see how that stunt of Gung's affected us in the jungle near the Rejang. The Black Horsemen had to be on hand when anyone was dying so that they could collect the soul, and when they passed us by we were thinking of the danger that threatened Herriott. It was a nice story for a woman who was nearly crazy with fear to listen to, was it not? The Dyaks had no lost relations, but

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their jawbones started to rattle; and I had no one that I thought was near death, and I was mighty scared; but that woman— By the wisdom of Cuvier! she was in a nice state!

“‘What direction have they gone?’ she screamed, when Gung had finished his story. ‘Which way did they go?’

“‘That way,’ said Gung, and he pointed into the darkness towards the north.

“‘Then we’ll go that way!’ she shrieked, and she started to push that terrified Malay into the thick night.

“Gung did not want to leave the fire just then. You bet he didn’t. Your frightened native will cling to a live coal like a crocodile to a mudbank. But that woman of Herriott’s was a determined woman. That story had made all her fears bubble over. Her imagination made her see Herriott’s finish after that nigger had told her what The Black Horsemen went out for. She was insane. I tried to convince her that the fool Malay had been chewing opium, but she said that opium would not bring that look of fear to his face when he was staring at the night. And I guess she was right. I have never seen a look of terror like the one that was pasted on that native’s face.

“‘Wait till morning,’ I said. ‘We cannot find any trail now.’

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"'I will not wait!' she screamed. 'I will go now!'

"She grabbed hold of Gung like a mad woman, and she pushed him towards the spot that he had been looking at. Gung did not like it one bit. He thought that he had enough of those Black Horsemen for one night without setting out on their trail, but he did not know what a woman who loves her husband can do when she thinks that he is in danger. That woman had the strength of three men just at that moment. She took that husky native and rushed him forward as if he were a baby, and I followed them. Those six Dyaks followed too. They were too scared to stay behind. They snatched some lighted branches from the fire and scampered along behind us.

"Belief, my friend, is just a question of presenting the thing that you want a person to believe. That is all. You might be inclined to laugh at this story of The Black Horsemen, but you would not have laughed that night in the jungle. The thing would have bit through the coating of scepticism that you have put over your bump of credulity. I am an unbelieving person sometimes, but on that night I was different.

"The woman started to cry out the name of her husband, and her shrieks went out into the silence. 'Be quiet,' I said. 'You will stampede the niggers.'

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“‘But The Black Horsemen!’ she sobbed. ‘My husband is dead or dying! Follow them! Follow them! Hurry!’

“Sometimes now, on quiet evenings, I sit here and look back on that night. I try to analyze the feelings that gripped me. I am a German, and I am not easily excited, but on that night I flung my mental ballast overboard and did crazy things. I rushed along with the woman and Gung, plunging through the thick undergrowth, and behind me came the Dyaks, waving the fire sticks they had plucked from the fire. I was as scared as the Dyaks. I was frightened more than I can tell you. At Gravelotte, my friend, I did not get scared when the French were giving us something hot; but the French were flesh and blood, and they made mighty good marks to aim at. Those things that Gung was chattering about were somewhat different.

“I cannot describe that night to you very well. I mean the part of it between the time we left the fire and the time that the dawn came out of the Celebes Sea. I am in doubt about little parts of it, and it annoys a scientific mind to find that things are a little hazy. It was a fiendish night—a terrible night! I thought that the darkness was a blanket that was wrapped around us, and out of which we were trying to claw ourselves. Claw ourselves, mind you! Did the night ever feel that

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thick to you that you were certain you had a lump of it in your hand when you shut your fist? Well, that night was one of the thick kind. It smothered us. We choked in it. Sometimes, when an infernal snaky liana gripped my throat and nearly jerked me off my feet, I was in doubt if it was a creeper or an invisible hand. I was a confounded old fool that night. I was silly. That is why I say that belief is only a matter of presenting the thing that you want the person to believe in.

"We must have been running about two hours when that fool Gung got another of his pop-eyed turns. He fell on his knees and started groaning like the devil, and when the woman shrieked a question at him, he said that they were right in front of us. He meant The Black Horsemen were just in front of us. You can smile, but you would not have smiled in that place. I would have given something to be back in my bungalow at that moment. I was full up of that circus. You bet I was. I got that mad that I kicked the Malay in my temper, and I dragged him to his feet and pushed him forward. I was as mad as the woman to see what was in front of us, and to find out if that fool could really hear something. All I could hear was the sighing of the jungle and those little puffs of wind that the Kyans call 'the breath of God.' Gung was nearly insane with fear, and those six Dyaks were mighty.

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crazy too. What with the woman calling for her husband, and the Malay gasping out the news of The Black Horsemen it was mighty tough. It was enough to send a man out of his head.

“‘Gung,’ I said, ‘if you do not stop your tricks I will strap you to a tree and leave you there.’

“‘But they are here!’ he moaned.

“‘Shucks!’ I roared. ‘Do you think that I am an old fool?’

“‘But, master,’ he cried, ‘I heard them go by, and they are just ahead of us now!’

“I gave that fool a bang in the ear; and just as I did that, I fell over something and tripped on my face. ‘*Himmel!*’ I yelled. ‘I will be mad before this business is finished. Bring me a light till I see what I have tripped over.’

“One of the Dyaks ran up with a torch that he had carried from the fire, and I poked around in the jungle grass. I found that something pretty soon. It was the body of the Kling guide that had gone out with Herriott, and there was a little hole in the back of his head where a rifle bullet had caught up to him when he was running. And Herriott did not have a rifle. He had only a shot gun.

“You can understand the row that Herriott’s wife kicked up when she saw that dead Kling. You can guess how she went on. She was a mad-woman for certain then. Someone had shot that nigger

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from behind, and that satisfied me that the fellow who was following Herriott was not a friend of his. I knew then that he was an enemy who had probably trailed him from the United States to the Philippines, and from Palawan to the Rejang River.

“It was too dark to see the trail of anyone leading away from that body, and I implored the woman to wait until morning so that we could pick it up and follow it, but she was gambling on the intelligence of the Malay. She reckoned that the finding of the body proved that Gung had made good, and she would not wait. She was convinced that the fool nigger had seen or heard The Black Horsemen. My, yes! She was beseeching him to go on, and that shivering native was that scared that he didn't know whether he was going frontwards or backwards. And I was an old fool too. I had not one ounce of sense at that minute. When she pushed Gung forward I followed, and away we went again, the Dyaks waving their fire sticks as we ran.

“You know how you sense a danger in the dark. Well, once I thought that we were running along the edge of a precipice, and that chilled me too. I stooped and picked up a stone, and I jerked the stone into the darkness to the right. I did not hear the stone strike anything. It just went into the dark, and not a sound came to me.

“‘Gung!’ I shouted. ‘Where are you going?’

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Stop or I will kill you!’ My nerves had gone to pieces then, and I was as mad as a crocodile that has lost its tail.

“It was the woman that answered my question. She was insane, too; but it was a different kind of insanity. You bet it was. She was insane with the thoughts of the danger that threatened her husband, while I was crazy over my own danger. ‘Gung must not stop!’ she screamed. ‘I feel that I am near Clinton!’

“‘You are mad!’ I yelled back. ‘That fool nigger will be the death of all of us!’

“I could not catch the answer she flung back at me. I think she called me a coward. I am not sure.

“I threw another stone into that spongy darkness to my right as I raced along, and I could not hear that stone drop. It made me sweat good and plenty. And I threw one more stone, and it was the same thing. If I could have got my fingers on Gung at that moment I would have throttled him. I would so.

“‘Stop! Stop!’ I screamed. ‘We are running on the edge of a precipice!’

“The terror that came to me out of the dark made me throw myself on my face then, and as I fell I heard Gung and the woman crashing on through the undergrowth. But I had enough of that

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running business. Holy St. Anthony! Yes! I was determined I would not run another yard into that darkness. Not one yard.

“‘You old fool!’ I said to myself. ‘You have not lost your wits altogether. Stay right where you are till morning and then follow the trail of those two lunatics when the dawn comes.’

“My knees knocked together every time I thought of those stones that I had thrown. If you jerk a rock into the dark and you do not hear it strike the ground, it gives you a chill. Is not that so?

“I stopped in my tracks, and I screamed out to the six Dyaks. I told them that I was going to stay where I was till the dawn, and those niggers were only too pleased to wait. They had enough of that insane run through the night, and from the way they chattered to each other I guess that they had sensed danger from that ravine.

“Those Dyaks clustered round me in a little group, and after the sounds made by Gung and Mrs. Herriott had been eaten up by the night, a silence fell on that place that was damnable. It was so. It was worse than any silence I have ever known, and when I put a question to those natives they were that scared that they would not answer. I was wishing that Gung was within reach of my fingers as I stood there waiting.

“I stood there till the darkness in the east became

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a coppery tint, and then I started to creep forward again. You know the quiet of a tropical morning? It seemed as if the whole world was waiting for something—and into that terrific quiet came a sound that startled me. It was the report of a rifle, my friend. Yes, a rifle! I knew that Gung and Mrs. Herriott had no rifle, and as that sound came to my ears I called myself every kind of a fool for letting that pair get away from me. I damned myself for an idiot as I dashed forward with the Dyaks at my heels. A million questions were turning handsprings in my brain. What had happened? Who had fired the shot? What had Gung felt that had brought him in that direction? *Himmel!*

“That coppery tint in the east turned into pearl and then into baby pink. Then we could see just a little. The ravine that I had sensed in the dark was there all right. My, yes! It was filled with dawn mists that were like ghosts, and I wondered as I clawed myself along the edge how Gung and the woman had dodged it. And those Dyaks were wondering too. It was something to wonder about, I tell you.

“The sun came up with a hop like he does here in the tropics, and as I clawed my way through a clump of rattans and reached a clearing on the edge of the ravine, there came the report of another shot. It came from the big gash in the ground, and

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the place was so full of fog clouds that I could not see anything. Not a thing! The mist filled that chasm like big lumps of cotton batting, and I raced along the edge trying to peer down into it. There is nothing so mysterious as a big trench in the earth that is filled with fog—nothing. That place made me shiver.

"Those Dyaks were running up and down too. They wanted to see what was going on down there in the banks of mist. *Gott*, yes! And it was one of those natives that made the discovery. He had flung himself on his stomach, and he was peering down through the rifts of the fog bank. The heat of the sun was drawing the mist up, and when the Dyak made a soft noise and pointed with his hand, I dropped down beside him. I could see underneath that curtain. *Ja*. Down into the ravine I looked, and nearly three hundred yards down the bank I saw something that I thought was a bleached *tapang* log. Then I saw that I was wrong. The thing was moving, crawling along a ledge. It was going slow, very slow. It was creeping from one little clump of brush to another, and I held my breath as I looked. That crawling figure made me swallow with excitement, and as I stared I sensed who it was. You bet I knew. I could not see the face, but I felt who it was. It was Mrs. Herriott!

"Someone has said that imagination is but con-

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centrated race experience. I think it is. Something in that woman's actions tied my tongue. My race experience stopped me from calling out to her. My ancestors had seen a person crawl like that, and I kept quiet. Every muscle in my body stiffened as I lay there and watched her. I clawed the ground till my fingers were bleeding. In the quiet of that place I seemed to feel the strain that she was under. I seemed to feel the hate that was sending her along that dizzy ledge. I knew everything, my friend. I looked at the big clump of bush about ten feet in front of her and I prayed. I knew she was making for that clump, and the Dyaks knew. They had flung themselves down and were staring at her with all their eyes. They had done a little stalking in their time, and they were calculating the odds.

"A puff of smoke came out of that clump that the woman was making for, and we heard the report of another shot. I nearly drove my nails through my palms then. Of course you know why? The man that had shot the Kling was in the clump, and he was sniping at Herriott, who was somewhere down in the ravine!

"The woman stopped for a second when the rifle popped; then she crawled hurriedly forward. I have seen a leopardess crawl like she crawled then. Yes, I have. She slipped over those few feet of

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bare ground like a rock snake; then she gathered herself together and sprang!

"The mist covered that place the next moment, and with a mad cry I sprang to my feet and started to slip and slide down into the ravine. I beat those natives at that game. I was crazy to get to the woman to see if she had been successful. Somehow I felt that she had, and yet I cursed myself for letting her get away from me in the night.

"It was nearly twenty minutes before we reached that spot, and then we saw her. And we saw Herriott too. She was trying to lift him to his feet, but he had got a bullet in the hip and he could not stand. I looked at the woman and she looked at me. I think the wife of the primitive man must have looked like her when she helped her mate to kill the she bear that had invaded their cave. I think so. There was a look on her face that was new to me, and Gung's knife was stuck into her belt, and it had blood on it. When she saw me look at that knife, she dropped her eyes and kissed Herriott.

"That is all I have to tell you. I doctored Herriott, and we carried him back to the Rejang. I didn't ask questions. Not one! Mrs. Herriott gave Gung about five hundred dollars worth of presents, and when Herriott got on his feet they packed up their things and went back to the Philippines.

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“But it was peculiar about Gung and The Black Horsemen of Mir Jehal, was it not? I wish I had a plaster cast of him as he squatted in that jungle when he said that he heard them riding by. I would think a lot of it. Never have I seen a man listen like he listened then. Never!”

*The Orang-Outang Fight on
the Papuan Queen*

IX

THE ORANG-OUTANG FIGHT ON THE PAPUAN QUEEN

The Story of a Fourteen Day and Night Vigil

THERE is a guarantee behind this story. You will read of it at the end, and the Amsterdam address of Herr Scheibel will be furnished on application. It is Scheibel's story, and he told it one night in a little *café chantant* at Port Kennedy, when the peculiar purple twilight of the tropics was washing out the sharp outlines of the pearling boats in the harbor.

Scheibel was a stooped German naturalist, and he had spent the greater part of his life in those ports of the outer fringe above which Dame Adventure still waves her golden flag. He chattered in all the lingo of the Archipelago, and Kyan and Kling, Orang Laut and Malay swore by his knowledge. In the nipa-palm hut clusters between Banguey and Mabudauan he was always welcome, and his knowledge of the lower creation was extensive. He was familiar with the habits of the green water snake, and he understood the family relations of

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every other living creature between that reptile and the *Simia wurmbii*, the big, hairy orang-outang of Borneo.

Letters from his employers at Amsterdam followed him up and down the islands, and he carried out the orders which those letters contained. Implicit obedience brought him a yearly salary of eight thousand marks. He gathered everything from the jumping mudfish to the human heads which the genial Kyan tied up neatly with rattan fiber and smoked over his family fireplace, and occasionally he shipped his loads in bullnosed tramps that went cargo hunting up and down the tracks of the outer rim.

Delnard, once captain of a B. I. boat, who lost his certificate when he ran the *Prince of India* aground in Sunda Strait, had been speaking of the length of time a man could keep awake in the face of great danger, and he was telling of a sleepless watch of six days and nights when the naturalist interrupted.

“Dot was noddings,” he grunted. “Dot was what you call one easy stunt. But of course der man you tell of had nodding to keep him awake. I mean he had no big stake, no grade incentive, an’ derefore we may call it goodt. It is not a question of a man’s strength, it is a question of what he will lose by going to sleep.”

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"Well, this fellow would have lost his life," growled Delnard.

"His life?" repeated the German. "Of course he would! But what of dot? *Puff!* What does a man care for his life when he is very tired? Noddings. It is somedings greater dan life dot makes men do big deeds. But speaking of sleep I will tell you a story of a man. It is shust a leedle story but it will show what I mean.

"Dis man, we will call him Adolph, he was a naturalist, an' he loved his work. He went after der big orang-outangs of Borneo, der *wurmbii* an' der *satyrus*, an' for a whole year he trap dem on der Simujan River. It was der devil of a place. Der mist hung over der river like der fogs on der German Ocean, an' he drank quinine like I drink beer. He took it mit each meal, an' he nip at it in between. Hell is shust one degree worse dan dot river. But dere were orang-outangs dere, an' he trap, trap, trap for one year. He was shust obeying orders. He was what you call it, one tall private, eh?"

"A high private," murmured Merrin.

"Dot is it! He was shust a high private. Der generals were over in Amsterdam. Dey got letters from all der zoological beeples in der world telling dem what was wanted, an' den dey tell Adolph an' a hundred odder men scattered all over der earth what der zoological beeples ask for. Der gen-

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erals didn't know of dot Simujan River. Dey didn't know about der fog. Dey didn't know dot Adolph haf to drink so much quinine, or dey did not know how he haf to wade droo der mud under der screw palms an' risk der chance of losing his leg when he poked his toe in der eye of a crocodile taking der mud bath treatment. Dey would not haf cared if dey did know, so he did not write about it. Oh, no! Dey told him to get somedings an' he got dem. His peezness was shust to do as he was told.”

“But we were talking about sleep,” grumbled Delnard.

“Shust so, but I was spik to you first of der causes dot keep a man awake. You talk of life. Do de men dot get dere livings in der islands tink of dere lives? No, mine friendt. But dis Adolph haf somedings else. He was told to trap alive ten of der finest specimends of der *Simia wurmbii*, an' he did it. Dey were der very finest specimends. You never saw such orang-outangs as dose. No one ever did. *Gott in himmel!* No! Dey was grade hairy devils mit chests on dem like beer barrels. Dey was glorious specimends. Adolph drink dere health efery night in quinine, an' he was feel mighty proud of himself. He had done what no one else haf done. He shust sit an' talk to dose orang-outangs an' wish dot der boat would come along to take dem over to Singapore.

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"Der *Papuan Queen* was der first boat to come along, an' Adolph was in such a hurry dot he makes an agreement mit der captain to take dose oranges over to der Peninsula. Der *Papuan Queen* was shust one rotten ship. She haf all der *Simia wurmbii* seasick der moment der China Sea get under her and gif her a bounce. Efery one of der timbers cry out an' groan, an' der oranges chatter one to anodder an' say dey was not in a bretty safe place. Dey was rather intelligent, mine friendts. Efery time one of dose big waves slapped himself over der side dey would yell an' scream jus' like der women, an' dot captain laugh an' tink it funny. Adolph ask him did his ship always rock like dot, an' den he fall down mit laughing. 'She is chronic,' he was say; 'we stop once for a year in Santander in der Bay of Biscay an' she contract der habit.'

"Adolph tried to tell der *Simia wurmbii* dot tings were not as bad as dey look, but der oranges were not fools. Not much. Dey tink different. Der boat was buckshumping like a mad broncho, an' dose grade hairy devils watch her an' say tings to each odder dot was not complimentary to der owners an' captain.

"An' dose missing links was bretty right. Dot old sailing tub starts in to drink up der China Sea droo some cracks in her bottom on der second morn-
ing out from der Simujan, an' der captain stopped

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laughing mighty sudden. Der *Simia wurmbii* listen to him yelling out orders an' dey guess he was afraid. Dey is bretty observant, dose hairy devils. Dey screamed an' chattered a lot when dey see how tings were going, an' der captain got mad. 'Keep it up, you pigs,' he said to dem, 'if you do not scream now you will not get anodder chance,' an' dey seem to understand. He was order out der boats an' dey guess at tings mighty quick. Den Adolph start to cry, an' dose oranges cry mit him all together."

"Huh!" grunted a greasy beachcomber, "What was he yelping about?"

"Not from fear, mine friendt!" snapped the naturalist. "*Mein Gott!* No! I tell you he was one high private. Well? He had not finished doing shust what he was told to do. Dot was all. See? He was told to get ten *mias chappin*, as der Malay call dem, but instead of going to Singapore dey was going to der bottom of der China Sea. An' dere was never such specimends of the *Simia wurmbii* as he haf on de deck of dot rotten tub. Dey was der kings of dere beeples, an' dey haf hair hanging from der shoulders eighteen inches long. Never was dere such specimends in captivity.

"Der captain caught hold of Adolph when der boats were ready. 'Come on, you poor, blubbering Dutchman,' he say, 'we was haf to leave der menagerie.' But Adolph cursed him an' got away. Den

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der captain shout out to der men. 'Der Dutchman is gone mad cause we won't take his monkeys,' he says; 'lend a hand here.' Den some of der sailors grip hold of der naturalist an' dump him into der boat, an' der *Simia wurmbii* scream when dey see him go over der side.

"Dot scream did somedings. Der Irish mate was der last to come down der rope, an' dot scream of dose orang-outangs was touch his heart. He picked up der axe, an' he ran along in front of der cages an' smash off der locks; den he spring for der rope. 'I do not know if dey can swim,' he gasps, 'but, by jiminy I gif dem a chance!'

"Shust at dot moment Adolph got away from der captain who was holding him in der bottom of der boat. I told you dot he was one high private. Very goodt. He grab der rope down which der Irish mate was swing himself, an' he went up it shust as der first orang got out of his cage an' look over der side of der ship to see how deep der water was. Der captain tink dot fellow was going to shump. He yells out to pull like der devil, an' dey did, an' dey leave Adolph clutching der side of der *Papuan Queen* which was haf ten *mias chap-pin* walking round her deck."

"Served the blame fool right," growled Delnard.

"Shust so! Served der blame fool right," echoed Scheibel. "But he could not help himself. His

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life he did not tink of. *Ach!* No! He was tink of dose ten. Dey were der gradest specimends der world haf ever seen, an' he haf written his employers to say dot he was ship dem from Singapore. Dot was why he come back on dot tub. Dose ten was so splendid dot he never tink the *lieber Gott* would take dem from him again after he trap dem, dot was all. An' he was born to do as he was told, an' dose men who are born so do not tink of life.”

“Well? What happened then?” asked Merrin, as the naturalist remained silent.

“Now I come to der sleep question,” said Scheibel slowly. “Dere was no chance of getting dose *Simia wurmbii* into dere cages again. Dot Irish mate was a goodt man mit der axe. Adolph did not know what to do shust for a minute, but he do one ting dot was bretty lucky. He got der wheel, an' he keep der *Papuan Queen* before der wind, an' der wind was blowing to der west. Singapore was in der west. He know dot an' no more. He was not a sailor; he was study der lower creation. Der ship was bretty low in der water den, but she was still afloat, an' Adolph haf been trained to hang on mit his teeth skins while dere was a chance of somedings turning up.

“Dose *Simia wurmbii* was stand an' look at him after dey see dot dere was no land near dem. Dey was not fools. Dey know dot Borneo was in der

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east, an' dey know dey was going in der wrong direction. Dey smell der Simujan River on der breeze dot was come across der ocean, an' dey talk a lot in monkey gibberish. Dey sniff der pandanus palms, an' der durians, an' der mangosteens an' dey was sad, mine friendts. Dey hold a consultation an' dey decide dot der leedle steering wheel dot Adolph was turning was der cause of all der trouble, an' a big hairy devil was make a suggestion. He was tell dem to take der leedle wheel an' break it up an' drop it over der side, an' dey scream out an' clap him.

“Dot was quite a little fight shust den. Adolph was lash der wheel an' go to meet dem at der ladder. He was haf a revolver but he did not want to shoot. Oh, no! Dey was der finest specimends dot der world ever see. He shust wanted to give dem a leedle bit of discouragement, an' he do it mit a bar of iron. He banged dem on der head an' der arms, an' dey clawed at him mit dere big arms an' bit mit dere teeth. But dey was haf no discipline. Dey was not come together, but one after der odder an' dey get dot big crowbar on der head efery time. But it was quite a leedle fight. Dose missing links spend der rest of der day feeling der lumps upon themselves, an' Adolph was do a bit of doctoring on himself. One of dose oranges was tear his leg open mit his big hand, an' anodder had nearly knocked

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out his eye mit a piece of wood. Dey wanted dot wheel bretty bad.

"Now I was talk about sleep. *Ach!* I was talk it blenty now. Dose orang-outangs know dot Adolph was take a leedle snooze some time, an' dey wait. Der *Papuan Queen* she was lay down bretty low in der water, but some timber in der hold keep her from sinking. Der *Simia wurmbii* pick der big hairy devil as dere leader, an' dey rush on Adolph in der dark. He had been blanning for dot rush, an' dey got a surprise or two. He laid a leedle powder train in dere track, an' der fireworks upset dem mooch. But dey fought game. He laid one senseless an' broke der hand of anodder mit a shot from his revolver. He cried when he see dot fellow mit der broken arm next morning, but he had to do it. Dey wanted der wheel, an' it was his peeze to see dot dey get it not. Dis is where I simplify my argument. Dis is where I show dot it requires somedings more dan love of life to keep awake for der very long time. An' Adolph haf dot somedings. He haf to get der ten finest specimends of der *Simia wurmbii* to Singapore, an he was trying to do it. Dot is why he was haf to keep awake.

"Der *Papuan Queen* was shust a water-logged hulk der next day, but Adolph keep her nose to der west, an' der *mias chappin* cry when dey smell Borneo on der wind. A lot of dem haf wives an'

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children on der bank of der Simujan River, an' dey feel bretty bad rolling along der top of der China Sea. All der day dey prowl round der ship an' cry out at him an' make faces at him.

"Dot night dere was a devil of a fight. Dey would haf won if dey haf any system, 'but dey haf not. Adolph fought like der devil, an' when he haf dem on der run he chase dem down past der cook's galley, an' he grabbed some biscuits an' water before dey turn round. But dey use him bretty bad dot night. He was haf a wound in der chest dot was bleeding mooch, an he tinks dey win in der end.

"Der next day one of der *mias*, a grade ugly devil mit black teeth, climb up der mast mit haf der carpenter's kit in his hands. He fling der hammer at Adolph, an' Adolph dodge it. He fling der saw, an' der end of it was take a leedle bit out of Adolph's ear. Der orang-outang grin, an' he cry out to his mates dot he was doing peezness up on der mast. Den dose devils toss him up everydings dey could find, an' he bombard Adolph mit der speed of a Gatling gun. Adolph was cry. He saw dot he could not engourage such tricks, an' he sacrificed der animal as a warning to der others. Dot stoped dot trick mit dem. Dey pull der dead orang up to der front of der ship an' dey cry over him an' make faces at Adolph, den dey dump him overboard."

Scheibel stopped and puffed vigorously at his

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pipe. A Lascar yelled a boat song as he walked down towards the water, and the naturalist seemed to be listening.

“Do I want to tell you all dot happened on der *Papuan Queen*?” he asked, when the sound of the Lascar’s song had died away. “Dose devils take turn an’ turn about to watch Adolph to see dot he do not sleep. Do you tink he did? You was not know der *Simia wurmbii* if you tink so. *Ach!* No! Der man dot Delnard tell you of shust now he could doze for der leedle while now an’ den, but Adolph could not. Once he shut his eyes for one second, an’ der axe go by his head like dot. It was fierce. An’ it keep up day an’ night for— How long do you tink?”

“*Gee!*” gasped Delnard, “I couldn’t guess.”

“Fourteen days,” murmured Scheibel. “Dot was not Adolph’s reckoning, mine friendt. Adolph did not reckon der days mooch. He was too busy keeping dem devils away. But it was der difference in der date dot der skipper of der *Papuan Queen* gif as der day der old tub went down, an’ der time der French steamer *Montlucon* picked her up near Chantabun in der Gulf of Siam. Adolph was shust doing his ninedeenth fight mit der *Simia wurmbii*, an’ he was shust one mass of blood an’ bruises. You can picture dose odder fights dot I haf not told you of. Ninedeen dere was; Adolph haf cut der

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notches on der wheel. But he shipped nine of der finest specimends of der big orang from Singapore der week' after, an' den he was go back to Borneo to trap another one to take der blace of der one who was too fresh mit der hammer an' der saw. Dot is what I mean by der cause dot keeps a man awake. His life? *Puff!* His life was noddings gompared to dose specimends. No one efer saw der like of dem. *Mein Gott! No!*"

Scheibel drained his glass and stood up.

"I was wish you all goodt night," he said, and then he turned to the door.

"Say!" cried Merrin. "If you ever meet your friend, Adolph, tell him that I think he's a very picturesque liar. Don't forget the word. Pictur-
esque."

The naturalist turned with a snort of fury.

"Den you are a fool!" he screamed. "See!" He tore the thin tropical shirt from his bosom and exposed a tremendous scar extending from the throat to the waist. He turned himself around to the light, and his eyes blazed. "Look here! An' here! An' dis! An' dis!"

He dragged up the legs of his moleskin trousers, and a cry of horror went through the room. He had evidently been terribly mangled at some period of his life.

"I am like dot all over!" he cried, as Merrin

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muttered an apology. “Do you want to see more? No, it is not nice. My middle name is Adolph. I say goodt night again.”

He kicked the baize door open and passed out into the darkness.

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X

THE BLIND DOG OF EL CORIB

A BOSTON Sunday newspaper had arrived in the mail of Harrison, the tall New Englander, and Hochdorf, the greatest naturalist in the Malay Archipelago, sniffed suspiciously as he glanced over its pages by the light of the slush lamp.

"It is wonderful how interesting some small things are to your people," he said slowly.

"Small things?" snapped Harrison. "Why, what do you mean?"

"This," said the German, tapping the sheet. "Here are five big articles on this page, and what do you think they are about? They are written on buried treasure, my friend."

"Thunderation!" cried the New Englander. "Isn't that sort of thing interesting to any sane person? I could read that stuff for a month on end."

Hochdorf tossed the paper to the floor, and the soft breeze that came out of the jungle played with its tattered pages.

"Did I ever tell you of the Blind Dog of El Corib?" he asked. "No, I did not. Throw some-

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thing at that whining *mias* and I will tell it to you now. It is a story of gold, and you might like it.”

Harrison jerked a piece of wood at the *ourang-outang* that cried in the darkness of the hut, and the naturalist began.

“This happened before I came to this infernal archipelago. A Peninsula and Orient liner dropped me at Aden one day, and from Aden I wandered down the east coast of Africa on stinking Italian passenger boats. I was at that age when a man does not care which way he goes as long as it is a new way. That is the golden age of life. *Ja*. Those skies of brass, and those soft, tropical nights, and that oily water, that was like ten million colored snakes wriggling out of the way of the steamer’s blunt nose, was good to me. You bet it was. I had been cursing the smallness of the Kaiserstrasse for many years, and when those big combers of the Indian walloped the blistering sides of those old coasting trollops, I yelled with joy.

“At Mombasa I thought I would rest for a while, and in that dirty hole I went to work for a Greek, who was trading in ivory and other things. There I met Lenford and Hardmann, two Americans, who were also working for that trader, and they were both at the age when the honk of a wild goose or the sniff of a spring wind would send them off on a new trail. *Himmel!* Yes. They were a pair of

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devils. They said that the *lieber Gott* had given them a world to see; and if they did not see it He might be angry with them when they had run their little race. They were good fellows. Mombasa is not a place where you can find many people that you would like to speak to, and I blessed my stars for bringing me to the same place as those two boys.

“That Greek trader was dealing with countrymen of his, that lived up and down the coast, and it was one of those little trades that roused the curiosity of those two Americans and myself. You do not know El Corib? It is a section of filth and fever and poverty about fifty miles from Mombasa, and a countryman of the man that employed us lived at that patch of iniquity. And that countryman was handing us a surprise once a week. A mighty big surprise, too. He was sending up to Mombasa a weekly packet of something that we did not think could be found at El Corib.

“You would not expect elephant tusks to come from New York, would you? Or you would not think it likely that crude rubber would come from Chicago? Well, that Greek at El Corib—his name was Poulogos, and I shall never forget that name—he was sending up gold, and gold was something that El Corib was not famed for. *Nein!* We did not think that there was an ounce of gold in that village till Poulogos got busy with his weekly ship-

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ments. And they were not little bits of gold he was sending, my friend. They were big cakes of it: twenty-five, thirty, and thirty-five ounce lumps of gold. The stuff had been melted in a pot, and melted mighty roughly.

"Those two Americans lived with me in a big room, over the shop of an Arab who dealt in perfumes. We wanted some perfumes to keep out the smells of the street. *Ach*, yes! Those smells were terrible, and in the hot nights, when we would sit and swear at Mombasa, we would wonder over those packets of gold that the Greek, Poulogos, was sending up from El Corib. Those packets puzzled us. Poulogos was finding gold, and it seemed that Poulogos was the only one that was finding it. You can guess how that annoyed those two Americans. They had no great respect for Greeks, and yet a Greek was beating them to it. And they belonged to a nation that generally gets to the tape before the others when gold is the prize.

"'The greasy brute must have struck a treasure box,' said Lenford one night, as we sat cursing those smells that came up from the narrow streets.

"'And he is a confounded Levantine fish peddler,' said Hardmann. 'How far away is the place?'

"'Only about fifty miles,' said Lenford, 'and we might as well go south as north.'

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“The next day something happened that made us mighty eager to get on the track. You have read the ‘Arabian Nights,’ my friend? Well, I am thinking that all those stories are true stories. They were scare-head yarns down in Persia, when my ancestors were running around the Black Forest and fighting each other with the leg bones of the hairy Aurochs. Do you remember how Mrs. Cassim was worrying her head to find out what Mrs. Ali Baba was measuring, and how she rubbed the fat on the bottom of the measure? Well, we were like Mrs. Cassim; but we did not know how to solve the puzzle; and just because we did not know how, why, Fate took a hand.

“I told you that those lumps of gold were melted roughly. Well, the one that came the morning after we had been discussing the distance had been melted more hurriedly than any of the others. A piece of mud was stuck to one side of the lump, and when I knocked that piece of mud off, before putting it in the scales, I saw that the clay had protected the design on a gold coin, so that it was still quite plain to the eye. And when I saw that design I nearly fell in a faint. It made me gasp and made my limbs weak.

“You do not understand anything of the science of numismatics? Well, I cannot brag over the little I know of the subject. When I was a boy I worked

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for a money-changer at Sachsenhausen, and I picked up a little knowledge of coins—just enough to make me feel startled when I saw the design on that coin. That symbol was an archer, kneeling upon one knee; and it struck me like a blow in the face. Do you know why? The coin was a Dacic *stater*, named from Darius Hystaspes, the father of Xerxes. Darius ruled over Persia five hundred years before the birth of Christ. You might have heard of that gentleman. It was him that the Greeks defeated at Marathon when he was trying to get a footing in Europe.

“You can guess how I felt when I saw that design. And you can guess what those two Americans thought when I told them of it in the evening. They wanted to start down the coast that night, which is the way of you Americans; but I made them wait till the next day. Then we resigned our positions, hired a native boat and set sail for El Corib. Mother o’ me! they were two wild devils. That boat had holes in it that let the Indian Ocean in on us at the rate of a gallon a minute; but those two mad Americans would not delay by running for the shore.

“It was hell. I baled till my arms were so stiff that I could not feel them, and we raced down the coast as if seven devils were after us. An American in a hurry is a nightmare to a German,

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who has been brought up to go about business in a quiet manner. *Gott!* Yes.

“We struck El Corib just as that boat was falling to pieces, and El Corib was about the ugliest spot that I had ever seen. It was a devil of a place. You think that Borneo is not a place to be in, and you think that this Samarahan River is particularly bad; but this place is a section of heaven, if you compare it to that filthy spot below Mombasa. I dream of that place now. I dream of its stinks, and its slime and its rottenness. It was founded when the Phoenicians were the big noise, as you say, in the north of Africa, and it had started to rot from the first day. I know it was very old. There are the ruins there of a temple built to Astarte, who was worshiped in Sidon some few centuries before Herod came to Judea. It was built on a little peninsula of sand, and those dirty houses seemed to be crouching in terror, lest the waves would leap over the big red wall on the seaward side.

“Those two Americans were pleased to find that place so old and dirty. If it had been clean and new, they would have thought I had made a mistake about the golden *stater*. To them it looked just the place where a buried treasure would be.

“‘It looks like a graveyard,’ said Lenford; ‘but it is just the sort of place to find buried bullion in.’

“‘Sure,’ gurgled Hardmann, and that boy was so

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overjoyed at the prospect of a treasure hunt that he whistled 'Yankee Doodle' as we tramped across the sand stretch to the opening in the red wall.

"We rented a little room that reeked of oil and fish, and then we started out to find what sort of a person was this Mr. Poulogos, who was melting down gold *staters* that were worth ten times their weight in Berlin or New York. *Himmel!* It made me hot when I thought of the ignorance of the man.

"It was an easy hunt to find Poulogos, or, at least, to find out all about him. We did not want to speak to him. My, no! We only wanted to find his anchorage, so that we could follow him round and see where he found those yellow *staters*.

"Poulogos was a fish peddler, and he lived in a dirty alley that was called the Passage of Thirteen Evil Winds. I guess those thirteen evil winds were always at home in that place, too. Our noses told us that much. Nine out of every ten people in El Corib had empty bellies, yet Poulogos was thought to be one of the poorest. It made us laugh to hear that story. He peddled rock fish for a living, and he was that thin and starved looking, that his eyes had burrowed back into his head as if they were afraid of seeing old Mynheer Death at one of the alley corners.

"'He knows his business in bluffing this batch that he is a poor man,' said Hardmann.

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“‘*Ja*,’ I said, ‘if he told this mob that he was worth three marks they would tear him to pieces.’

“They would, too. That mob fought for the scraps in the streets like dogs. I have seen famine-starved Hindus that were no worse than they.

“We elected Lenford our leader in that little business of trailing Mr. Poulagos, and Lenford decided that we should work in three shifts, so that our friend, the *stater* melter, would always have a shadow on his heels. I did not like that spying business, but the thought of that design of the archer kneeling on one knee made me put my scruples aside. Those coins, I felt sure, did not come to Poulagos in the way of business; and I argued that if he had made a treasure find, it would not hurt him much if an honest German and two young Americans got a few of those ancient pieces.

“Trailing Poulagos was the devil of a stunt. It was so. That Greek was playing the poverty game down to the ground. Every day he carried his cursed fish basket into the lowest quarters of that place.

“‘We mustn’t leave him for a minute,’ said Lenford. ‘When he goes home we must sit near the doorstep till he comes out again.’

“And that is what we did, my friend. There was no back door to that place in the Passage of Thirteen Evil Winds, and when Poulagos went inside we took

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care that he did not come out without our knowledge.

“We were crazy to get a share in the treasure. When I explained to Lenford and Hardmann that each one of those *staters* was worth about five dollars, just for their gold value, they could hardly sleep during their time off duty; and when I told them what they could get from collectors and from museums, they felt inclined to get hold of that greasy Greek and shake him till he led the way to his treasure chest. You bet they did.

“We shadowed Poulogos night and day for seven weeks. Not for one minute did we let up. And it is not easy work, following a person. I would sooner skin crocodiles than do it. *Ach*, yes! And in a place where the smells rose up and hit you like clenched fists it was worse than it would be in a civilized spot.

“‘I think he is suspicious of us,’ said Lenford. ‘What do you say if we pretend to go away and then slip back on him?’

“‘*Ja*,’ I said; ‘that is a good plan.’ That young American was a pretty smart man.

“That night we got into an old *dhow* that we had purchased and slipped down the coast; but we did not go far. We beached her about fifteen miles down the coast; then we took off our clothes, stained our faces, put on tattered burnouses and started

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back to El Corib. We were going to try a surprise on Mynheer Poulogos.

“It was a devil of a tramp to that place. The swamps along the coast made me think that it would be best to go back to the *dhow* and go up to Mombasa, but those two Americans would not listen. They knew that Poulogos had a little secret of his own, and they had made up their minds to get that secret. The American is a devil when he sets his mind on doing a thing. Now, the German is a philosopher. If he finds that the difficulties are too great, he will light his pipe and forget all about it. With the American it is different, much different.

“I was tired of treasure hunting, when we saw the lights of that stinking town show up through the fever mists that made my bones ache. I could not speak the Arab lingo, and I was thinking that I would get a knife in the ribs before I was finished with that business. You bet I did. But those boys were as merry as crickets, as they splashed through the mud.

“‘I bet he makes for the plant as soon as he finds out that we have jumped the burg,’ said Lenford. ‘We’ll go down to his camp in the Passage of Thirteen Evil Winds and see if he is at home.’

“It was midnight then, and it was so dark in those alleys that we felt that we were choking.

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We were feeling our way with our hands and with our feet as well. All the filth of that place was tossed out into the middle of the alleys, and Hardmann and I made some nice somersaults as we followed Lenford. And we could not swear. It is dangerous to swear in either English or German, when you have a burnoose over your head. *Gott!* Yes!

“We had reached the top of the passage where the Greek lived, when Lenford, who was leading, sprang into a dark doorway, and we hurried after him. We moved mighty quick at that moment. Someone was coming up the alley, and a spear of light that came through the broken shutter of an Arab café had let Lenford see who that someone was. It was Poulogos the Greek. It was so.

“He was hurrying like the devil, and the moment he passed us by, we turned and followed him. You can bet we did. We had the feeling that he was on some important business. We had—what is the word you Americans use? *Ach!* Yes! A hunch! Well, we had a hunch as we sneaked after that fish peddler.

“That was some tracking business. In and out of that cursed network of lanes we went, till we were so tired that when we fell we hardly had the strength to get up again. It was a mad night. We went through all sorts of places. Once a big brute

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of a negro jumped upon Lenford, but that youngster floored him with a punch on the chin, and went on after the Greek as if nothing had happened.

“After a long time we came out on the strip of sand in front of the red stone wall. The Greek was in front of us, dodging in and out of the shadows. We were breathing mighty hard just then. The fish peddler was acting as if he wanted to make sure that no one was on his trail, and we were certain that he did not know we were behind.

“Presently he dived into a patch of shadow near the wall, and we stopped and waited. We waited an hour, but he did not come out of that shadow. He did not. And we were certain that he did not climb the wall. He was somewhere in the dark near the wall, and we wondered what he was doing there.

“‘I’ll go and see,’ whispered Lenford. ‘I will walk slowly by and he will think I am a fisherman from the shore.’

“Lenford walked by the place that the Greek was hiding in; then he turned and rushed back to us in a hurry. ‘He has gone!’ he said. ‘The greasy beggar has walked into the wall.’

“That was about the only solution to that business. Poulogos had walked into the wall. *Ja!* He could not have got over it, and we had watched to see that he did not come out of the patch of shadow. And we could find no opening in that wall. Not

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one. Hardmann had a dark-lantern that we had brought from Mombasa, and with it we examined that stone barrier. It was an old wall, but it had been well built. You bet it had. In one place there was an inscription in raised letters, and I puzzled those Arabic characters out by the light of the lamp. The two lines read something like this:

Blessed be Allah! Remember his word,
And the Blind Dog that watches will never be stirred.

“‘What does that mean?’ asked Hardmann.

“‘The Lord only knows,’ growled Lenford. ‘We want to find that Greek instead of worrying our heads with riddles on the wall.’

“We went up and down that red wall for about an hour, and just as we were beginning to think that Poulogos had slipped us, something happened. It did so. Hardmann pulled us back into the shadow, and when we stared at the point he pointed to, we saw that Greek walk out of the wall. *Himmel!* It gave us a start. We had been examining that wall for an hour, and we could not find a hole big enough for a fat lizard to crawl into. Not one!

“I could feel Lenford’s muscles stiffen as he watched Poulogos, who was standing still and looking around him to see if anyone was about. Those two Americans saw Broadway and the gay cafés

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and the pretty women on the avenues when they saw Poulagos come out of the wall.

“The Greek stood still for about a minute; then he seemed satisfied that he was not followed, and he slipped away into the night. We moved mighty quick the moment he disappeared. My, yes! We moved for the spot where he had appeared, but we got a disappointment when we got there. There was no opening! Not a sign of one. There was the red wall, and just at the spot where we thought Poulagos came through, was the inscription about Allah and the Blind Dog, that we had read a little while before.

“‘But there must be an opening,’ whispered Lenford. ‘Let us feel for a spring or a hinge.’

“We started to feel that wall mighty good. We rubbed it up and down till our fingers were bleeding, and we damned that fish peddler as we rubbed. We knew that we were close to the secret place where those golden *stater*s of Darius Hystaspes were hidden, but we could not get in. And just then a wonderful thing took place. Yes, a mighty wonderful thing! Lenford put his hand on the first Arabic character of the word *Allah* in that inscription, and we gave a gurgle when he did that. A slab of stone, about three feet square, swung back, and when Lenford thrust the lantern into the opening we looked with popping eyes.

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“There were steps leading from that opening, steps that were wet and slimy. Do you know that the soles of my feet can feel those steps now, and it is some years since I went down them? Do you think that strange? You will not think so after I tell you what happened in that place. But they were so slimy that it was like treading on the oily body of a native or a snake. The centuries had covered those stones with wet moss that seemed to feel unclean under one’s shoes. Yes, I can feel the sensation now in my feet as I think about the two hundred steps that led to the bottom. We were crazy as we raced down those steps. The seven weeks of waiting had made us mad, and we did not stop to think of anything.

“We got to the bottom at last, and we found ourselves in a bare cavern that had stalactites hanging from the roof. And when Lenford held up the lantern to have a look at the roof we got our first glimpse of the Blind Dog of El Corib. *Ja! Ja!* I would give my year’s salary, and that is ten thousand marks, if I could blot that beast out of my mind. I would so.

“He was a monster dog, carved out of stone, and he was bigger than the elephants in front of the Temple of Bora. He was a tremendous size, and as we stared at the monster we saw why the inscription on the wall had alluded to him as the Blind Dog.

The Blind Dog of El Corib

You have seen the picture of Justice with the bandage over her eyes? Well, that dog had a stone bandage over his eyes.

“The Blind Dog stood at one side of the cavern, and beneath one of its upraised paws there was a passage that led to an adjoining cave. And, as there was nothing in the cavern that we were in, we made for that passage. Lenford went through first; then Hardmann, and I crawled through last. I got to my feet, and then I looked—*Gott!* Sometimes I think of that night and wonder if it was a dream. I wish it was, my friend.

“In the Hohenzollern Museum at Berlin there is a gold *stater*—a Daric *stater*, in a glass case. The curator of that museum showed it to me. If I went back there tomorrow and told that old man that I had seen a million Daric *staters*, he would think that I was mad. He would laugh at me. But I saw them! A million? I saw five million of them! That curator would have me arrested if I told him that. He would so. The most exciting thing in his life is his Sunday walk in the Thiergarten, so he would not believe. He could not be expected to. Belief, my friend, is like a liking for caviar—one must be trained to it.

“We fell on those piles of coins like wolves. There were a dozen sacks lying about, sacks made out of palm leaf fiber, and into those sacks we

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scooped the coins that were over twenty centuries old. They were coined before Marathon, before Miltiades swept the Persians into the sea at Vrana! I do not know how they came to that spot. The Phoenicians, and the Medes, and the Assyrians, went down that way after myrrh and balsam and jasper, when they had few historians about. That is so. And I guess that some big man in those days had a little private bank in that wall. *Himmel!* It makes my eyes water to think now of that place and what was in it.

“I don’t think we spoke while we were scooping the coins into the sacks. We just made noises like beasts. Gold is the devil of a thing. It makes a man worse than the animals.

“Hardmann got his sack full, and he lifted it up in his arms. Would you believe if I told you how much gold he had? Of course you would believe. I am not telling this story for fun. He had a hundred pounds or more! Yes!

“‘I’m ready,’ he said. ‘Come on.’

“Lenford stood up and picked up the lantern, and Hardmann staggered forward towards the opening beneath the paw of the Blind Dog. I see him in my dreams as I saw him then. I do. I see the big black shadows that danced around as Lenford swung the lantern; I see the wet walls of the place and the piles of gold we were leaving. But I see

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Hardmann most of all. I shall see him in my dreams till I die. Mother o' me! Yes!

"That boy stooped to go through that passage beneath the upraised paw of the Blind Dog. I saw him stoop; then—why, he was gone! Have you ever seen a fly crushed by a sledge? Well, that is what happened. That stone paw came down with a force that was tremendous, and before it had lifted again, we were listening to the noise made by the gold coins as they hit against the rock walls of the place. Hardmann's coins, mind you! The bag on his back had just missed the paw as it smashed against the body of the big carving. There was no Hardmann there. That is, there was nothing there that I would like to think was Hardmann. No, there was not!

"At the moment that the paw struck that boy I thought I heard a laugh that came from the other cavern, and Lenford thought so, too. He was paralyzed for a minute; then he made a spring at the passage. But I gripped him by the shoulders.

"'Stop!' I cried. '*Stop!*'

"'There is someone out there!' he screamed. 'Let me go!'

"'Drop the gold!' I shouted. 'Drop the gold! Don't you see that it is the extra weight on the stone beneath the paw that has caused Hardmann's death?'

"Breath of the Jungle"

"Have you ever noticed how a lot of small things will be welded together in an instant? In the instant that I witnessed that tremendous stone crash down on that boy, I understood why it was that the gold was sent up to Mombasa in small lumps. I understood the meaning of the inscription, too. You bet I did. The Blind Dog was the watcher of that gold. Poulogos, the Greek, knew that you could not steal a sackful of that metal, because the stone beneath the paw was so fixed that it would stand the weight of a man, but not the weight of a man and a bag of coin. That is why the Greek stole in small amounts. Perhaps some friend of that fish peddler had met such a death as Hardmann had met.

"'Drop the gold!' I roared. 'Throw it on the floor!'

"Lenford was so horrified at what had happened that he did not understand what I meant for a few seconds; then he flung the gold on the floor and sprang at the opening. He was game, game as the best of them. The paw was back in its old place then, and I watched him with staring eyes. I was wondering if my theory of the action of that murderous stone hammer was the right one.

"I was right. The boy went through, and the next moment I heard his revolver in the outer cave; and I dived through that passage and caught up to him. Up the wet, slimy steps we went side by

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side, and in front of us in the darkness we heard someone running—running mighty fast. My skin told me who that someone was. Poulogos had come back again, and he had just reached the outer cave in time to see Hardmann killed. And the devil had laughed at that happening. Laughed at it! You can guess how Lenford felt as he blazed away with his gun. He was insane. He wanted to kill that Greek. And I wanted to kill him, too. I was sick from the sight I had seen, and I wanted to do something to get even with the stone thing in the cave.

“Lenford got close to Poulogos as we reached the top of the stairs, and the boy fired again. That shot saved our life. It must have wounded the Greek. He let out a yell and bounded through the opening in the wall, and he was that scared that he would not stop to slam that slab on us. If he had fastened it we would have been prisoners with the Blind Dog and the *staters* and—and the memory of Hardmann.

“Poulogos fled down the path leading to the marshes at the back of that cursed place, and we went after him. We were crazy men. My, yes! We ran through that thick night after the figure that was in front of us, and we thought of nothing else but the killing of that man. On and on we went. I don't know how far we ran. It must have been

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leagues. And always in front of us was a phantom we thought was Poulogos. Yes, it must have been a phantom. When the dawn sprang out of the east we found ourselves in a swamp miles away from El Corib, and there was no sign of the Greek. That hyena had dodged us in the darkness. Mind you, we did not think that Poulogos had anything to do with the death of Hardmann. *Nein*. But he had laughed when the paw of the Blind Dog crushed the boy, and you would have killed your own father if he had laughed at that moment.

“We were three days fighting our way back to El Corib. I don’t remember what we lived on, and I don’t remember what we said to each other. When we reached the hell-hole we were nearly insane with the want of food and with the bites of insects. And our clothes were in tatters. My, yes! We were the two sorry looking specimens as we crawled back to that place.

“We went round toward the wall, and Lenford held his revolver in his hand as we approached it. That boy had grown old in a night. His jaw stuck out, and his mouth was a gray line.

“‘I will stand guard at the opening, and you will go down and see,’ he said. ‘I am going to bury Slim if I shoot the town up.’

“I was going to tell the boy that there was little there to bury, but I said nothing. Side by side we

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tramped along, and an occasional Arab that we passed would stand and look at us. We were the only two white men in that town, and we must have looked strange with our tattered burnouses.

“We reached the wall at last, and then we stood and stared at each other. The inscription that mentioned Allah and the Blind Dog had been chiseled off, and the wall had been covered with a coat of thick red paint so that it was impossible to find where it had been! That was what met us in that fever-smitten place. Wasn't it enough to drive us mad?

“All through that day we fingered the wall. We did so. Arabs and negroes came and stared at us, but we took no notice. Our fingers were bleeding, but we kept at it.

“‘Lenford,’ I said, when the night came down on us thick and lonely, ‘I am full up of it. I am going away from this cursed place. Come; we will get a boat and go up the coast.’

“‘Not me,’ he snapped. ‘I am going to get into that place if it takes me ten years.’

“‘Come; don't be a fool,’ I said. ‘Come with me.’

“‘Go by yourself,’ he shrieked. ‘Do you think I would let a Greek beat me to it? I will stay till I get into this hole and do things that I want to do.’

“I tried to dissuade him, but it was no use. And

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I was nearly insane. *Himmel!* Wasn't I sick of that place. I remember that I staggered down to the water, stole a boat and pulled into the night. I kept pulling till dawn, then an Italian freight steamer sighted me and picked me up. I was in bed for three days; then they put me ashore at Dar-es-Salam.”

Hochdorf stopped speaking, and the only sound that disturbed the silence was the rustling of the Boston newspaper as the breeze played with its tattered pages.

Presently the tall New Englander spoke. “And Lenford?” he asked. “Did you—did you ever hear how he got on?”

The German naturalist stepped into the bungalow and returned with a small camphor-wood box in his hands. He dragged the slush lamp closer, trimmed the wick; then he opened the lid of the box. Inside, reposing on a piece of cotton wool, were ten gold coins, and on the face of four we saw the design of the archer on bended knee.

“Lenford sent me those fourteen months after the night I left him in El Corib,” said the naturalist gently. “He sent them in care of my father in Frankfort, and he sent them to me. They are my most treasured possessions, my friend. That boy made good. *Gott!* yes! Every day I drink to his health. With those ten Daric *staters* was a little

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note. It said: 'From Lenford, on his way to Broadway.' That was all. Wasn't he a hellfire boy? I don't know how much he got, but I bet he took his own share and the share that belonged to Hardmann. I bet he did. Fill up my glass and I will drink his health again. He was a great boy."

*The Golden Woman of
Kelantan*

XI

THE GOLDEN WOMAN OF KELANTAN

HOCHDORF, prince of animal collectors, laughed softly when I put my question. I had asked for proof of a jungle story, and the query brought a chuckle that had the razor edge of a *parong*.

“Proof?” he cried. “Why, you find proof in the atmosphere after you come through Bab-el-Mandeb. That is, if you have a receptive cuticle. *Ja!* Sometimes I am in want of proof myself, and then I use my skin. That is so. I ask of it a question, and it gives me all the proof I want in quick time. Don’t you feel the night fingering your face? And are not the trees listening? And is there not something in the air that strips your soul so that your first love affair comes up before your eyes? That is the feel of Asia, my friend, and it proves a lot of things. There is no atmosphere in the world like this. *Nein!* And it is worse than the poppy habit—you cannot get away from it. Sixteen years ago I went back to Germany, and Borneo came after me in the nights. My, yes! It fished for my soul in my dreams — fished for it with

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a net that was all crimson and lilac, and shot-gold and peacock blue, and in the morning I would be weak from the fight. I could not stand that struggle. Not I. In six weeks from the day I landed in Amsterdam, I was pounding down the Red Sea on the old *Valetta*, of the Peninsula and Oriental line, and my nose was sniffing at the east wind. *Ach! Yes.*”

In the hot, punkah-lashed air of the nipa-palm thatched bungalow the odors fought for supremacy. The smell of the jungle rolled in boldly on the strange little puffs of air that the Orang-Laut call “the breath of God;” the sour stench of the black slime on the river bank formed an under stratum that advanced furtively, and to combat these two invaders, a penetrating odor came from the cages in the adjoining hut, where the German’s prisoners, monkeys and tiger cats, ourang-outangs and serpents, snuffled and moaned, snarled and hissed in the velvety darkness.

“Are you sleepy?” asked Hochdorf.

“Never less so,” I answered.

“Then I will tell you a story if you do not ask for proof,” he said quietly. “Proof? Ho, ho! I have given up looking for proof. To the East everything is possible, and that is why the East will live. It expects, my friend, and expectation is soul.

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“You have never heard of the False Buddha of Paknam? Well, there are thousands that lived within one hundred miles of him that never heard of him. But he was something out of the common. Much out of the common. He was a Laos priest from the head of the Me Ping River, and he took himself mighty seriously. He reckoned that he was the reincarnated Gautama, and he created a little flurry from Bangkok down to Singapore. A pretty big flurry when I come to think about it. The East is always waiting for something to happen, and that makes it easy for a fakir. *Ja*. He can get a following before their excitement wears down so thin that the knife analysis comes through. That is so.

“I was gathering specimens on the Telubin River in the southern part of the Malay peninsula, and I wanted to go to Bangkok. And that is how I met Bruden. He owned *The Red Spider*, a bull-nosed schooner that was going up the Gulf of Siam, and I took a passage on her. If ever a fiend came on earth to cool his skin it was Bruden. You can laugh, but I mean it. He stood six-feet-four; he weighed two hundred pounds, and he had no more morals than a hammerhead shark. And a hammerhead will bite the tail off its own mother.

“Up to the day of sailing I was the only passenger. Then there was a rush. *Ja!* There

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was a big rush. Five score disciples of the False Buddha of Paknam had been gathered up along the coast, and Bruden gave them deck passage up the Gulf. When they came aboard I got my first look at the golden woman of Kelantan. She was the one who had gathered up the bunch. That is so. She was some relation to the False Buddha. Some said she was his sister, some said she was his daughter, but I think she was his wife. I am sure she was his wife. The Gautama stunt was one that she, being a woman, could not play, so she put him to the front. She was not the first woman of brains who has stood behind a mate who did not have a big share of gray matter in his skull.

“Never have I seen a colored woman like her. Never! I could not make your eyes see her if I talked to you all night. There are some things that the brushes of imagination cannot paint, and that woman was beyond imagination. She was that. Just now I would give a thousand marks to know her breeding. And I would give a thousand marks to know where she had got her golden skin and her eyes that were deeper than the Tengpeng Well. I would so. She was not Malay or Negrito, Siamese or Shan Burman or Karen. She was something different. *Ja!* very different. I have never seen a brown woman with a hundredth part of her beauty. She was like Van Eyck’s Madonna del Lucca that

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was in the Stadel at Frankfort when I was a boy. She was wrapped in a *sarong* of rose-colored silk that looked as if it had come out of the vat in which the dawn clouds are tinted. It was figured all over with the wanderings of Buddha that were worked in threads of silver and gold, and it was caught up with a brooch of Burmese jade. Her bare arms and ankles were ringed with bracelets of hammered silver, and these bracelets looked as if they had been old when Tamerlane came riding into the Punjab. *Mein Gott!* she was a wonder woman!

“Have you ever pigeon-holed people that you have met with people that you have never met? Well, I pigeon-holed that woman with her golden skin, and her rounded limbs and her ten-thousand-fathom-deep eyes. I put her with Sappho of Lesbos, with Helen, with Hypatia, and Saint Monica. She was a flame. That is so. She was a flame that could make that bunch of pilgrims blaze like the very devil when she got going.

“Bruden came into collision with her before we had the anchor up. *Himmel!* Yes! He had not seen her when she came aboard, but just as *The Red Spider* started to butt her way into the open sea, he saw something of her that made him splutter. One of her five score recruits took it into his thick head to fall on his knees as Bruden was running across the deck, and the big skipper tripped over

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him and nearly broke his neck. You can guess how that brute felt when he got to his feet. He was mad clean through. He sprang at that nigger and he kicked him till he jerked yells into space that were like hot wires. Bruden was a devil—a devil of devils.

“The golden woman was at the other end of the ship when she heard the first yell, but she got to the spot before the other pilgrims had sensed what was wrong. She was an unleashed fury just then. You bet she was. But she was beautiful in her temper. Flames of Gehenna! Yes! Her eyes blazed like the eyes of a Bengal tiger, and her face was like a drawn blade.

“As she faced Bruden I noticed her bare left foot, and I saw that the second toe was missing. Afterwards I learned that she had been bitten by a *karait* while recruiting that mob, and that she had coolly ordered one of the niggers to chop her toe off. I believe it. I would believe anything of her. But that little defect was the only blemish in her beauty. In her beauty, mind you. I have been out here six and twenty years come next October, and never have I seen a brown woman who was more beautiful. She had all the witchery of Asia, the witchery that you can sniff in the dawn air, and in the swooning noondays and the velvety nights—she had it in herself.

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“Bruden looked at her when she came blazing down on him, and I could see that she had made an impression. You bet she had! He opened his bleary eyes when she flung a shower of questions at him, and for quite two minutes he could not speak. Mission bred she was, and she spoke English without an accent.

“‘What do you mean by kicking that man?’ she cried. ‘How dare you?’

“‘He dropped down in front of me and I fell over him,’ snarled Bruden.

“‘But you had no right to kick him!’ screamed the woman.

“‘And he had no right to trip me,’ roared Bruden. ‘If he wants to kneel down and slam his wishbone to please old Budd he must not do it in front of me when I am running.’

“‘You are a low brute!’ said the golden woman.

“I think it was the way she said it that pleased Bruden. I think so. It was seldom that anyone had enough grit in them to fire a verbal bomb at him. Not much. When he got mad he was like a hooded snake, and men and women got out of his way. If he kicked a nigger the nigger made for what you call the tall timber pretty damn quick, but that woman was different from all the people that Bruden had ever met. She did not care ten *pfennigs* for him, and she let him see she did not.

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“‘I am a brute, am I?’ he growled.

“‘A low brute!’ she hissed. ‘You have maimed that man.’

“‘That is nothing,’ snapped Bruden. ‘I have maimed dozens, and I have forgotten about them ten minutes afterwards.’

“‘You fiend!’ cried the golden woman. ‘It is a wonder that you are allowed to defile the sweet earth!’

“She put her shining arms under that dirty Malay when she said that, and helped him up into the shadow of the galley, leaving that big brute of a skipper to stare after her as if he were hypnotized. She had handed him something that staggered him for a minute or two. Ho, ho, yes!

“Every time he came on deck after that he looked in her direction, and she glared back at him like a wounded *mias*. I wished myself on any other boat but *The Red Spider* when I saw that devil’s face. My, yes! He was as strong as ten men, and I told you that he had no more morals than a hammerhead shark. He had less. And he thought that his strength could get him anything. Do you understand? There were no ten men on that boat that could fight with him. No, nor twenty men. There is an anchor at the Victoria Docks at Singapore that Bruden carried. *Ja*. No five men can move it. I heard of that anchor when I went down

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to Penang from Bangkok. He was a big, fierce devil, and he looked at that woman with the eyes of a cheetah watching a muntjak. And every man on that boat understood his look. Out in this part of the world there is no need to tell people things. They feel them. That is, all people except the English. That is why the English rule. If they had the receptive cuticle they would have vacated India the day after they grabbed it. I tell you that because I have sat here for six and twenty years with this atmosphere feeling my face as it is doing tonight.

“Those five score pilgrims felt what I felt. *Mein Gott!* Yes! They saw the look on that brute’s face, and they knew that the hate in the woman’s eyes would only make him more determined. I could not tell you enough about Bruden to let you know what he was. I could not. There were no laws for him. *Nein!* He was one of those primitive brutes that you find on the rim of the earth. In a city he would have been hanged mighty quick, but out here— Well, Justice is a fat *Frau*, and the likes of Bruden are left to the judgment of the *liebe Gott*. That is all I know.

“He looked at that woman in a way that turned me sick. And it turned those pilgrims pretty sick, too. They found that they had shipped with a demon, and their eyes sent out hate sparks every

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time Bruden crossed the deck. They looked to me like five score cobras that were waiting to sting a big, tawny tiger who treated them with contempt.

"That golden woman held a prayer meeting when *The Red Spider* was well to sea, and the way she handled that batch was a revelation. My, yes! It was uncanny. She had psychic force. I told you that she was a flame. Well, she was. She worked on that batch till she slammed fire-crackers and rockets out of them. They were drunk with their own emotions, and when she chanted to them in the Malay dialect they saw scaling ladders going right up to the door of their own particular heaven. All your little revivalist speakers were small cakes compared to her. I know what I am saying. When she finished they would have jumped overboard if she held up one of her shapely fingers, and I got a creepy feeling in my skin. I did so. It did not require much intuition to smell trouble on that boat. No, it did not.

"All the damn riffraff of half-castes, beach-combers, and beach-bummers that Bruden had for a crew, were impressed by that performance, but it did not impress the big skipper. His skin was too thick. He only saw a woman who was more beautiful than the Lorelei, and he was not afraid. It is the fools who have not the *antennae* to feel danger who are considered brave. Somebody has

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said that a coward is a man who sees a little farther than his fellows, and that is right. I was with Prince Friederich Charles at Spichern, and I know. Bruden could not feel danger. His skin was thicker than the pelt of a Ganges gaval.

“After that prayer stunt he went up to the woman and tried to talk to her. *Ach!* If looks could have killed him she would have killed him ten times while he was walking towards her. She had bayonets in her eyes, but he laughed at her when she tried to glare him off.

“‘Am I still a fiend, pretty one?’ he asked.

“‘I do not wish to speak to you,’ she answered.

“‘Say that I am not a fiend,’ he said, grinning at her like a baboon.

“‘You are a fiend!’ she cried. ‘Go away. I do not wish to speak to you!’

“‘But I wish to speak to you,’ grinned Bruden. ‘This is my ship, and I guess I can speak to passengers if I like.’

“That big brute had no respect for man or woman. He had no respect for God. That is so. He was a cave-man who thought that muscles were everything. He turned me sick just then. That woman started to walk away, and he put out his big hand that was like the claw of a gorilla, and he gripped her bare arm.

“‘I want to say a word to you,’ he said. ‘I have

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a little proposition to make that is better than chanting to old Budd.’

“She turned with the swiftness of a rock snake and struck him in the face with her open hand, and then hell broke loose on that deck. That bunch of long-haired pilgrims came at Bruden like wolves. *Himmel!* Yes! They had been waiting for that moment, but they did not know what a devil they were up against. No, they did not. If they thought it was going to be an easy fight they were mistaken. *Ja!* Bruden turned around in time to escape a drive from a *kris* that a lean Malay made at his back, and the next moment he had gripped the wrists of the *kris* man and was whirling him round and round his head. I told you that he was as strong as a bull elephant, did I not? Well, he used that skinny-legged nigger as a club, and he knocked down half a dozen of the mob every time he swung him around. I think that devil was itching for a fight like that. *Ja!* He howled like a gray wolf as he twirled that Malay like a piece of teakwood. That is so. He was enjoying it like I would enjoy a glass of iced lager. That circle of insane niggers rushed round and round him, but every time that they tried to clinch with him it was smash, crash, bang. It was frightful. I am not a baby, but that deck made all my nerves as tight as the backstays. Not one of the crew made an attempt to help Bruden. That

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demon did not want help. It was fun to him to smash up those poor wretches. It was great fun. When he was tired of it he just fought his way to the companion stairs, flung the senseless nigger at them with a laugh and went below to his cabin.

“They did not make an attempt to follow him down. Not they. He had taken all the fight out of them at that moment. They stood around chattering like so many *wah-wahs* till the golden woman ordered them to look after the half score that Bruden had injured. It was nice, wasn't it? One has to stay with his color in the East, white with white, and black with black, but I fingered my revolver just then. Yes, I did so. I wondered what was coming in the days that lay between us and Bangkok. You bet I did. I knew that the business had only started as far as Bruden was concerned.

“The mate of *The Red Spider*, a flat-faced animal who had a Maori father and a white mother, thought the same as I did. He edged up close to me when the chatter of the niggers had stopped, and he told me his opinion. He smelt trouble — tons of trouble. He was half native, and his skin was helping his eyes.

“‘Skipper better leave the woman alone,’ he said. ‘Think mighty dangerous business.’

“‘*Ja!*’ I said.

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“‘She mighty smart witch-woman,’ he grunted. ‘She put whole ship on the blink.’”

“I felt that she would put Bruden on the blink if he did not watch out. I did that same. I did not know how the danger would come, but I thought that the fool was playing with fire. That woman was not the sort that Bruden was in the habit of speaking to. Not much. She was as far removed from him as the Zuyder Zee is from the Run of Cutch. She was not an ordinary woman at all. I did not care if she was recruiting for a fakir; that was nothing to do with it. But I knew that she was a good woman, and that was enough for me to know. *Ja*, I knew that. She was a woman who could not be anything else but good. And that big, ugly fool thought that he could do what he liked just because he was the skipper of a blamed old bull-nosed schooner. I have seen others like him. They have thick skins and no imagination. They forget that this Asia is so old that it comes out against you like a clenched fist if you do anything that it disapproves of. It has a personality, my friend, that is what it has. I have seen fools knocked off their legs in this quarter. *Mein Gott!* Yes! I knew that I was a fool to take a passage with that pig of a skipper. You bet I did.

“‘They will kill him,’ said the Maori mate.

“‘I hope they do,’ I snapped.

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“I stood on the deck and watched the oily water that looked like a million colored snakes, and I sniffed the smell of Asia as it came out to me on the breeze. That golden woman seemed to be as old as Asia—not in years but in wisdom. She was something that seemed to be gifted with perpetual youth. That is so. She did not look to be more than five and twenty, but those eyes of hers were as old as the crystalline rocks of Cape Comorin.

“Bruden came up on deck early in the afternoon, and he yawned and stretched himself like a lazy tiger. Half of that batch of pilgrims were lying full length on the deck, but the moment they saw him they moved towards the spot where the woman was sitting. And that made Bruden laugh. He took it to be a compliment to himself. That is so. He laughed so loud you could hear him a mile away. He was a stupid, big fool.

“‘Ho, ho!’ he cried. ‘Do not be afraid of me, my little brown pets. I will not hurt your beautiful princess. Not me. I am as gentle as a wood dove in the springtime.’

“He walked across the deck to where they were gathered in a bunch that looked as ugly as a nest of scorpions. The golden woman was in the middle of them, and when Bruden came close she spoke.

“‘Keep away,’ she said to him quietly. ‘I do not wish you to come near me.’

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"'But I like you,' grinned Bruden. 'Holy St. Christopher! can't the skipper of a boat flirt a little with his star passenger?'"

"'Keep off,' she said. 'It will be better for you to go away and leave me alone.'"

"'Not it!' cried Bruden. 'I like you, woman. It's a fact! You're the loveliest brown woman between the Chol Bazar and Yellow Dick's at Hakodate.'"

"He tried to push in near her, and that batch sprang at him again. *Ja!* They came at him like mad dogs, and in a minute he was fighting again.

"And the brute loved a fight. He did so. He laughed like a madman as his big fists, that were larger than the hams that come out of Westphalia, knocked down those rice-fed wretches like nine-pins. He was a fiend for sure. He battered them till they squealed, and they broke and ran from him like the cuirassiers did at Sadowa.

"Suddenly Bruden stopped and glared around the deck. I looked around, too. You bet I did. The golden woman was not in sight. She had disappeared while he was fighting!"

"Bruden dashed across the deck and let out a yell. 'Where did she go?' he cried. 'Where the mischief has she got to?'"

"The pilgrims did not speak, and you can bet *I* did not. He turned to the Maori mate and roared

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his question again, but the mate shook his woolly head. And I had not seen where she had gone, and neither did the mate. No, my friend. That woman seemed to have melted from in front of our eyes, and at first I thought she had dropped overboard. But I did not think that for long. The faces of those pilgrims put that notion out of my mind. They were watching Bruden, and they were very quiet. They would not have been so quiet if she had gone over. Not them. They would have clinched with that demon mighty quick.

“Bruden turned to the mate and he cursed like an Afghan horse dealer. *Gott!* didn't he curse? He damned everything within sight, and he kicked like a madman at every nigger that came within range of his big sea boots.

“‘Search the boat!’ he yelled. ‘I want to speak to her! Find her, you hounds! Find her!’

“The mate set the rest of the crew hunting for that woman, and I waited with a pretty sick feeling in my insides. That is so. If I have ever seen a fiend it was Bruden. He was mad. He rushed around shouting out orders till he was hoarse. And all the time he rushed around and roared, those five score Malays crouched on the deck and sprayed him with their hate. That is it. They sprayed him with the hate that they had in their eyes.

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“I could not tell if they were afraid that she would be found. No, I could not. There are not many hiding places on a schooner, but that mob had the stoicism of the East, and their faces told me only of the hate they felt for the big brute who was harrying the woman. That hate was mighty plain. *Ach, yes!*

“When the night rolled down on *The Red Spider* they were still searching for the woman. They had searched the schooner from end to end, and they had searched in vain. And that was a miracle. Don't you think so? I thought it was at the time, and I have been thinking so ever since. In some things the English are wise. They say that they do not want to understand the East. *Gott in Himmel!* They say that they only want to rule. It is funny, it it not? The East makes my brain dizzy when I think of making an attempt to understand it. I am blind and deaf before it. That is so.

“But that search made me sick. To see that big brute rushing round the deck made my skin creep. Sometimes my fingers curled themselves around my revolver, and I would have to tear them away. The five score pilgrims in the white wrappers said nothing. Not a word. They just huddled themselves together and used their eyes only. They were hating Bruden with every ounce of soul pressure. You could feel it well out from them. It came out

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like a wave, but that brute did not feel it. He had a thick skin, and he could not feel anything.

“When the moon came up, one of the pilgrims stepped out from the bunch and handed Bruden a little wooden box.

“‘What is this?’ asked the skipper.

“‘She sent it to you,’ said the nigger, and then he slipped back amongst the others.

“Bruden was going to open that little box, but he changed his mind. He might have felt the wave of hate at that moment. I do not know. It was curious for him to act as he did. He gave the box to a Dyak sailor to open. It was just a little box about three inches square, and it had a nick in the cover so that you could put your thumb nail in and draw back the sliding lid.

“The Dyak put his nail in the little nick and pushed, and the lid flew open. But the Dyak dropped the box with a yell. My, yes! A little steel point had curved up out of the box as the lid was drawn back, and the point of the steel pricked the sailor’s hand. Down he flopped on the deck, and in five minutes he was dead. I guess that the fright helped the poison that was on the end of the point. The box is an old trick in the East, and the Dyak knew that he had drawn a ticket for the next world when it touched him.

“That little incident maddened Bruden. He

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went clean off his head. He could not find the man who had given him the box, so he jumped at the whole mob. Round and round the deck he chased that batch, howling like a wolf. It was terrible. At last he fell down from exhaustion, and the Maori mate and three of the crew carried the brute down to his cabin. That ended the search for the night, and I was mighty glad, too. My, yes! I watched those pilgrims after Bruden had been dragged below, and I felt a chill as I looked at them. You could gather up that atmosphere and analyze it, and it would assay ninety-nine per cent. pure hate.

“It was about nine o'clock on the following morning when I got a surprise. Much of a surprise. *Ja*. Bruden was below in his cabin, and just as I turned in my walk on the poop, that golden woman walked across the deck as cool as an iceberg and started to put that batch of niggers through their morning prayers as if nothing had happened. It made me cold right down to my heels. My spine was just like a little strip of ice. It seemed as if she had tumbled out of the skies. It did so. *The Red Spider* was not as big as a Bibby liner, and Bruden and his crew had overhauled every inch of the boat. And the wonder of it was that she looked as fresh as a daisy. Her *sarong* of rose-colored silk had not a crease in it, and she had not the look of a person

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who had been in a cramped space all night. Not a bit of it. Her hair was as glorious as ever, and her skin shone in the morning sunlight. It was wonderful to me, mighty wonderful.

“She started those niggers praying, and no one ever prayed like they prayed. *Gott!* didn't they pray! It was not that they made any noise. They prayed quietly. But the intensity—My, I cannot tell you of the feeling it gave me. You could *feel* them praying. That is a fact. They just wriggled and twisted their bodies as if they were in labor with the hate they wished to get out and fire at Bruden, and I felt sick as I watched them. And I am not easily made sick. I have lived out here a pretty long time, but never have I seen natives act like that batch on *The Red Spider*. They were so quiet that I wanted to yell out because the silence was choking me. That is so.

“The praying business took the wind out of the Maori mate. He started to run down the stairs to tell Bruden that the woman had come back, but instead of doing so he stood with his mouth open till she had finished. Then he picked himself up and tumbled down into the cabin screaming out the news, and my fingers crawled around that revolver butt again. The subconscious mind is wonderful. It is that.

“I could hear Bruden screaming out questions as

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he raced up, and he sprang out on the deck with his bleary eyes blinking.

“‘Where is she?’ he roared. ‘Where did the cunning witch stow herself?’

“I gripped my revolver when I saw his face. I was mighty mad just then. I am a German and I do not get mad at little things, but when I get mad I am—*mad*. And I was mad at that time. *Himmel!* Yes! The way that big brute was going on would make an angel lose his temper. It would so. As he rushed towards the woman I pulled my revolver out of my pocket and stuck it in his ugly face.

“‘If you touch her I will put a hole in you!’ I said, and I was mighty scared when I said it. He could have cracked my neck with two of his big fingers, and he looked at me like a big, hairy gorilla when he stopped for a minute in front of my gun.

“‘Put it down!’ he roared.

“‘When you leave that woman alone,’ I said.

“He looked at me for a minute, and then he sprang. He was an animal all right. It was the leap of a *mias*. I fired while he was in the air, but I missed him, and the next moment he had cuffed me on the side of the head and I did not take much interest in affairs on that boat for the next five minutes. Not much.

“When I came to my senses I found that I had

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been dragged into the scuppers; and I knew from the row and the rumpus that something had happened that was not pleasing to the skipper. Bruden's voice rose above everything else, and as I pulled myself up I saw him dash across the deck yelling out instructions.

“‘Hunt for her!’ he screamed. ‘Hunt for her, you blind-eyed bats! She just walked away while you were gaping at her!’

“I looked at the pilgrims, who were sitting like marble statues, and I knew what had happened. I did so. The golden woman had disappeared again!

“That second hunt made me wonder a bit. You bet it did. I lay there on the deck and watched them do everything but tear the schooner to pieces, but they could not find a trace of her. Not a trace. While all their eyes were watching Bruden spring at me, she had slipped away. It was enough to make one feel creepy, was it not? Out there in the Gulf of Siam with not a sail in sight, that woman had disappeared like a ghost. It was wonderful. I do not think we will ever know anything about this place. I am sure we will not.

“All through the morning that brute hunted for her. He was a lunatic then. The wonder of the thing had got into his thick head, and he was insane. Once he stopped in front of me and kicked me in the ribs like he had kicked the nigger.

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“‘Which way did she go?’ he roared. ‘You confounded Dutchman—you gave her the chance to slip from me!’

“‘And you can go to the devil and find her!’ I screamed, and he gave me another kick for my insolence as he rushed away.

“I have never met such another fiend like him. Never! All through the hot afternoon he kept the crew on the jump, but they could not find a trace of the woman. I have thought a lot of that since that day. She was on the boat, mind you, but where she hid herself is a mystery to me now. It is that. It was wonderful to think that she could find a place on that schooner that Bruden overlooked.

“Night came down on us again, and a big moon came up out of Annam and silvered the Gulf. There was hardly a puff of air. *The Red Spider* was not making a knot an hour. And it was mighty lonesome on that boat. You can just imagine it was. Bruden was still hunting with his crew of scoundrels, and the pilgrims sat together and moved their lips in prayers that they offered up in the hope that the big bully would break his neck.

“A fog came over the Gulf about midnight, a sort of luminous haze that made the things on the deck indistinct. I stayed on the deck, mind you. I did not want to go below. I could not go. I wanted to stay to see if anything would happen.

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“And something did happen. *Ja!* Just a little after midnight I heard a scream. It came up out of the cabin, and my blood ran cold. I had been expecting that scream all day. I had so. I knew that Bruden would not stop searching till he had found that woman, and the scream told me that she had been found. My, yes! That cry went up into the mist like as if it was in a hurry to get to the door of heaven to let the good God know what had happened, and I made a dash for the companion stairs. The fog made it hard to see anything, but as I ran I heard those pilgrims. You bet I did. They were coming after me, running towards the companionway, and the *pat-pat* of their bare feet on the deck made me think of a pack of wolves. It made me shudder when my imagination pictured what would happen when they got near Bruden this time. I guessed there would be murder all right. My blood was as cold as the fog that had swept down on us.

“Just as I reached the head of the stairs, the Maori mate who was on the poop, let out a yell to fool the niggers.

“‘She’s here!’ he screamed. ‘She’s up here on the poop!’

“The pattering of their bare feet stopped when they heard the mate’s yell, and while they were debating which way to run, I dived down the stairs.

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There was no lamp there, and as I felt my way, someone brushed by me. I could not see if it was man or woman, and when I cried out I got no answer. I kept straight on, but I was scared. There was only one scream. After that there was a silence that you could feel with your hands. It was terrible. The fog and the silence made me think that *The Red Spider* was a ghost ship and that all the wonders of the two days were dreams that had got into my brain. My, it was queer.

“I started to run along the little passage towards Bruden’s cabin, but I did not run far. It was dark there, mind you, and I had not taken a dozen steps when I tumbled over something on the floor, and Bruden’s big hand gripped my ankle as I fell.

“‘I have you, you witch!’ he roared. ‘I have you!’

“‘It is I, Hochdorf!’ I yelled, and then he swore.

“I nearly cried out to tell him that I was glad. I knew that the woman had got away from him again, and I was pleased. *Ja*, wasn’t I pleased?

“‘Get a lamp!’ he roared. ‘Get a lamp. I’m wounded!’

“I got a lamp out of the cabin, and when I rushed back with it Bruden was trying to get to his feet. The brute had a knife wound in the side of his throat, and he had bled a lot on the floor. She had nearly fixed him that time.

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“He snatched the lamp from my hand when he got to his feet, and he held it close to the pool on the floor. Someone had put a bare foot in that blood, and when I saw the imprint of that foot I knew that it was the golden woman. That is so. There was a small space between the print of the big toe and the third toe, and that small space showed that the second toe was missing. Yes! She had knifed him and run.

“‘Where did she go?’ screamed Bruden. ‘Get out my way, you Dutch fool!’

“He held the lantern close to the floor and rushed up the stairs to the deck. And I raced after him. He had taken my revolver from me when he knocked me down that morning, but I had bought a knife from a Lascar sailor, and I knew that I was going to kill him if he caught up with that woman. I felt that.

“He reached the deck, and still holding the lantern low, he rushed to the rail. I got the creeps when I saw him do that. I knew that the faint imprint led to the side of the schooner, and I was frightened of what had happened. The Maori mate and the mob of pilgrims were charging down on us through the fog, and I stood like a frozen man and watched Bruden. I felt that she had gone over the side, and he felt it too. He brushed his big hand along the rail, and then he held it to the light of the

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lantern. There was a faint smear of blood on the palm that told me she had stood on the rail before leaping, and my heart came up in my mouth. I gripped the knife and took a step towards that brute. Then I stopped, and the blade dropped out of my hand. Do you know why? That big devil sprang upon the rail, balanced himself there for a moment as if he were listening to some sound that came out of the fog, and then dived into the water!

“I yelled to the Maori mate. The mate knew his business. He had a boat in the water inside three minutes, and I found myself in that boat. *Ja*. There were three others of the crew in it, and as they started to row into the fog, I could hear those five score niggers on the deck screaming. It was terrible. They had discovered that the woman had gone over the side, and they were shrieking like fiends.

“That fog was like cotton batting. It was thick and moved in lumps. And I hate a fog. It is a nuisance when you cannot see where you are going. And that fog that we struck that night in the Gulf of Siam seemed to be the most peculiar fog I had ever met. It was low on the water, and here and there we struck a clear patch where the moon’s rays came down full on us. And it was moist and cold. *Ach!* It was as cold as a tomb.

“The Maori mate was yelling out as we pulled

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around in that white blanket, and every time he would yell out those niggers on the schooner would send a wail back to us. I tell you it was mighty weird. And you know how a fog fools you. Sometimes we would think that *The Red Spider* was in front of us, then we would think she was abreast of us, and then the yells of the niggers would make us think she was up in the air above our heads. Every time I see a fog I think of that night, and I shiver like a sick Kyan.

“Presently a cry came out of the mist, and the mate yelled back an answer to it. ‘It is the skipper!’ he cried. ‘He’s straight in front of us! Pull, you ruffraff, pull!’

“And just then another cry came from the same direction, and I got up and shouted to the three sailors. ‘It is the woman,’ I screamed. ‘It is the golden woman. Pull, confound you, pull!’

“My, that fog was queer. It was alive. It made my blood as cold as ice water as we burrowed into it. That is so. And every yard we went we could hear the cries of Bruden and the golden woman, but we did not seem to be getting nearer to them. And that was a mystery. The three niggers were pulling like mad, but we made no gain. It was the biggest mystery that I had ever struck.

“Suddenly the Kling and the two Dyaks stopped rowing and let out a yell that you could have heard

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five miles away. They had solved the mystery. We had been caught in a whirlpool, and the current was taking us along at a ten knot gait!

“You bet that those three sailors yelled. They thought it was all up with us at that moment. We were sure that we were in one. The boat was going round in a circle that seemed to be half a mile or more around, and its speed was increasing every minute. It gave me a cold sweat. We were just off Koh Samuie, and we had never heard of such a thing there. Round and round that boat went like a merry-go-round, and we could not see an inch in front of us. Not an inch. It is not nice to be swished along like that. Every minute I expected the boat to take a dive into the middle of the earth, and I blessed Bruden. You can bet all you have got that I said some sweet prayers for him just then. That whirlpool had given me what you call cold feet.

“Suddenly the mate jumped and let out a yell, and the Dyaks and the Kling yelled too. *Ja*. The fog broke for a minute to the right of us, and we saw something. We saw Bruden, and he was swimming like a madman. That is so. He was swimming in the opposite direction to the one we were moving in, and then we knew for sure that we were in a whirlpool. Bruden was nearer the center of the thing, and he was moving at a swifter rate than we were going.

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“The Kling tried to turn the boat, and he mighty near upset us. You could not turn in that flood. You had to go with the current, and we went. We went like mad. Did we not?’ Bruden was taken away from our eyes in three seconds, and we began to think of our prayers. At least I did.

“We saw the big skipper about five minutes after, and he was still swimming. It puzzled us to know why he did swim. We thought that we were going to the other world at a speed that was fast enough, but Bruden was helping the current. It was curious. That water was as smooth as glass—I told you it was a calm night, and there wasn’t a sound. It was mighty quiet just then. We had got away from the schooner and the screams of the pilgrims, and the swirl of the current on the boat was the only noise that came to our ears.

“The Maori mate yelled out to Bruden, and the big giant answered him.

“‘Swim towards us!’ yelled the mate. ‘Make for the boat!’

“What do you think Bruden answered? You would never guess. *Nein*. He yelled out: ‘She—she—in front. Can’t stop!’

“That was all he said. The fog closed in on him again, and he was out of sight. We could not guess what he meant. And when we tried to guess it made our blood go cold. The circles that the

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boat was making were getting smaller, and we guessed our end was mighty close. That was so. I pulled a few prayers out of the back of my head, and I said them quick, and those niggers chattered to their gods as hard as they could chatter. They knew that we were up against it good and plenty. When they tried to paddle against that mill race it whipped the oars out of their hands.

"I guess we were going round and round for twenty minutes before we saw Bruden again. Perhaps it was twice twenty minutes. I do not know. The brain is not a good calculator at moments like that. But when we saw him again he was still swimming. Swimming, mind you. We could see his arm go up and down, and this time he did not turn his head when the mate yelled out to him. He kept right on. He kept on as if he were swimming after something that was just ahead.

"'He's mad,' I said. 'He's mad!'

"'Sure,' muttered the mate. 'Bruden! Bruden! Ahoy!'

"The Kling gripped my arm at that moment, and he pointed to the thin fog bank into which the big skipper was swimming.

"'Look!' he screamed. 'Look!'

"'What is it?' I cried.

"'The witch!' he screamed. 'The golden witch!'

"I felt inclined to scream too when he said that.

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You bet I did. I looked but I could see nothing, only the fog. But those niggers guessed that they could see. They screamed out together, and then they fell down on their faces in the bottom of the boat and groaned like the mischief. It was a nice fix, was it not? And I had got myself into it on account of a mad brute. You can bet I was not praying for him at that minute. No, I was not. I kicked the Maori off my legs, and I said some mighty hot things about that ruffian of a skipper till my throat was sore. That boat was traveling as fast as a torpedo destroyer, and the niggers were smashing the silence into little pieces with their yells. It was terrible.

“Now I come to tell you of the things of which I can give you no proof. Not one little bit. That is why I told you not to ask me for any. You may ask your skin, that is all I can say. That accursed whirlpool stopped whirling just as I thought I had flung my last curse at Bruden. It was so. It stopped like you would stop a roulette wheel, and I kicked those niggers till they got out their oars and started to pull. And then we saw Bruden again. He was not swimming this time. He was floating in a little eddy at what seemed to be the very core of that maelstrom, and we pulled towards him.

“We dragged him in over the side of the boat and laid him on the bottom. He was not dead, but

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it would have been better for him if he had been. That is so. He had hit his head against a rock or something, and he was paralyzed. He could not move hand or foot, and he babbled like a baby. And now I will tell you the most wonderful thing of all. That big skipper had something gripped tightly in his left hand, and you would not guess what it was in a thousand years—no, nor ten thousand years. It was one of the hammered silver anklets of the golden woman, and it had not been in his hand when he jumped from the rail of *The Red Spider*.

“I do not know how he got it. I wish I did. But I could not pull it out of his grip, and he held on to it when we pulled back to the schooner as the fog swept away.

“Mind you, *I* did not see that woman in the water. Those niggers *said* they did, but I could *not*, and yet— Well, the East is a big proposition, and it grows bigger the longer you stay with it.”

A monkey whimpered in the adjoining hut, and Hochdorf plunged into the darkness. In a few minutes he returned with a baby *mias* in his big arms.

“And the golden woman?” I asked. “Did she— was she ever heard of afterwards?”

“*Ja*. That is the greatest wonder of all. I would give my year’s wages, and that is ten thousand marks, if I could have it all explained to me. When

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that Maori mate managed to navigate *The Red Spider* to Bangkok, I went ashore, and at the gate of the Temple of Wat Sutat I saw her speaking to a crowd. I was not astounded. Somehow I expected it. When we lifted that paralyzed brute onto the deck of the schooner on the night of the fog, those niggers were as quiet as mice. And that made me wonder.

“I went up to the golden woman, and when she had finished speaking I addressed her in English. What do you think she did? She turned and spoke to a Shan priest that was at her side, and he spoke to me. He translated what she said. Ho, ho, yes! He told me that she did not speak English, and that she was not allowed to speak to an unbeliever. And I laughed. I did so. I looked down at her left foot where there was a toe missing. *Ja*. And I looked at her instep where there was a big scratch as if one of her silver anklets had been torn off by force, and then I laughed again. And she stared after me with those eyes that were deeper than the Teng-peng Well, as I walked down the street. I have tried to put it from my mind, but it will not go. It is foolish to think too much about a thing like that. It is so. Are you sleepy now? I will give the baby *mias* a drink, and then we will turn in.”

The Little Gold Ears of Sleth

XII

THE LITTLE GOLD EARS OF SLETH

THIS is the story of Ulysses E. Slingsby, a one-time resident of Hoboken, N. J., but now a permanent boarder at Al-Kasim's sour-smelling little boarding house in Pasaca Street, Port Said. It is a true story. The Arabs say that a lie has no legs, and if one pursues a falsehood it will collapse like the one-eyed robber who attempted to steal the wonderful emerald breastplate of Mohammed. A truth, however, has wings that can take it out of the reach of the incredulous ones who would strangle the wisdom-laden words of the Prophet himself. The story of Slingsby has lived through five years of bazaar gossip, and its wings grow stronger day by day.

Ulysses E. Slingsby was an engineer in the employ of the Holworth, Hyde and Heppler Construction Company of New York City. Slingsby was a capable man and he was held in high esteem by the company. He was a conscientious, hard-working employee, and when the H. H. & H. Company gained the contract for the El-Nar Dam by underbidding their great rival, the Malbar, Fincham Com-

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pany, Holworth, the senior member of the firm, called Slingsby into his private office.

“Slingsby,” he said, “would you like to see the East?”

“The East?” repeated Slingsby.

“Yes, the East,” said Holworth. “Would you like to see palm-trees and elephants, flying fish and—and things like that? Temple bells a-tinklin’ while you work; sunny skies, sand, and the El-Nar Dam?”

Slingsby took a great breath and looked at the senior partner. “Would you give the chance?” he cried. “Would you?”

“It’s yours,” answered Holworth. “It is a big thing, Slingsby. Every minute counts, and if we fall down on this stunt the Malbar, Fincham crowd will gather in everything in that part of the world for the next ten years. Pack your grip and get your instructions; you will have to drive them night and day to get it through.”

Three weeks after that interview, Ulysses E. Slingsby, dressed in immaculate ducks, and wearing a new topee, stood upon the hurricane deck of the Peninsula & Oriental steamship *Maloja*, as that vessel glided along the big breakwater and tied up to a buoy off the landing jetty at Port Said. Slingsby was impressed. Already he felt the glamour of the East, although he had not yet entered

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the gateway. But from the moment he donned the white suit and magnificent topee he felt that he had sailed into the regions of Romance, and unexplainable thrills came to him as he watched the statue of the great De Lesseps, who, with arm outstretched, points to the massive trench which he dug through the sands to Suez.

"Gee! it's great!" muttered Slingsby. "It's fine! Why, it is snowin' back in old New York, an' this burg is as warm as Atlantic City in the summer time."

Slingsby went ashore by himself. Port Said nowadays is one of the best policed cities in the East. Lord Cromer has cleaned the town so that it is possible for a three-year-old child to walk in safety from the landing stage to the sand stretches beyond the Arab town—and Slingsby was a little more than three.

Ulysses E. did the usual tourist stunts. He visited the mosque, drove through the Arab quarter, and sipped cold drinks on the colonnade of the Continental as he watched the jugglers do amazing tricks. He bought curios that had been imported from Birmingham, Yokohama, and other far-away places, and he posted three dozen cards to friends in New York. Each one of the three dozen cards carried the message:

This is the greatest place ever. Me for the heat.

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As the shades of evening fell upon the town he walked down to the jetty, and with the firm belief that he knew Port Said from title page to back cover, he stepped into a boat and pointed to the P. & O. steamer that lay a few hundred yards from the jetty.

"Get a move on, Steve," was his jocular remark to the Arab boatman. "Let me see something lively in this burg before I shake its dust off my shoes."

Slingsby's ducks and topee, so he assured himself, made him look like an experienced traveler, and he felt quite pleased with himself as he lolled back in the boat and listened to the soft chant of the Arab.

"And it's snowing in old New York," he muttered. "Gee whiz! Snowing? And here it's warm and comfortable, with nice soft breezes and odors that make you forget everything and everybody."

It was just at the moment when Slingsby delivered himself of this little romantic speech that something happened.

A hawser stretched between the stern of the *Maloja* and a snubbing-post ashore, caught the Arab boatman beneath the chin. The Arab made a brave effort to preserve his balance, but he found it impossible. He fell against Slingsby, who had half risen from his seat when the wet hawser struck the

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oarsman, and the next moment, Ulysses E. Slingsby was struggling in the somewhat dirty water of Port Said harbor.

Slingsby could never explain what really happened to him after the upset. He had a belief that the boatman was strangling him. He tried to fight himself free of the brown hands that gripped his throat, but he found it impossible. He felt that he was being carried down into watery depths, and during the seconds that elapsed before he became unconscious, he remembered that an inner self was protesting madly against his stupidity in leaving New York to come to a place where it was possible for an Arab boatman to strangle a saloon passenger within hail of the big steamer upon which he was voyaging.

Ulysses E. Slingsby returned to consciousness at dawn on the following morning. For ten minutes, he lay with his eyes open, trying hard to recall the happenings of the previous evening. He remembered how the Arab had dragged him down, but he knew as he stared at the ceiling above his head that he had been rescued in time. He was alive, but where he was, he could not tell.

Slingsby lifted himself upon his elbow and examined his surroundings. He was lying on a small white-enameled bed in a little room that was

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furnished in Oriental fashion. There were rugs and cushions, tapestries and articles of curious workmanship that convinced Slingsby that he was in a house whose owner was not European.

“Where the dickens am I?” he muttered. “I’m not on the boat, but why the mischief didn’t they —” He lifted himself up and sent a yell into the silence. “Waiter!” he screamed. “Steward! Is there anybody about? Hey, there! Waiter! Steward!”

In response to Slingsby’s wild yell, there was a quick pattering of feet along the passage leading from the door of the little room. The door was flung open and Slingsby stared at the wonderful apparition that appeared. Slingsby’s own account of her looks, which he has retailed to four or five people, would lead one to believe that the woman who appeared in the doorway was more beautiful than Marna or the dark-eyed Zela whom the Prophet picked to welcome the faithful into the Seventh Heaven. Slingsby says that she was the most wonderful looking creature in the whole world, and no one can contradict Slingsby. No person can be found who saw the woman previous to that morning, and Slingsby has, since parting with her, spent five years at Al-Kasim’s stuffy little boarding-house in an effort to locate her.

“Where am I?” cried Slingsby, after he had stared for a few minutes at the glorious tinted face

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turned towards him. "Where the dickens am I? I'm not on the *Maloja*; where am I?"

"You are safe," murmured the apparition. "You are perfectly safe."

Slingsby asserts that the voice of the woman was as musical as the waters of the El-Nath waterfall which flows over a bed of smooth rock 'way up beyond Temsal, and, once again, Slingsby's word must be taken because there is no one to contradict.

"But the steamer?" cried the engineer. "The *Maloja*! Why am I not aboard the steamer?"

"The steamer has sailed," murmured the woman. "She sailed last night."

"But why wasn't I put aboard?" cried Slingsby. "Why didn't they take me aboard when they pulled me out of the water? Why did the fools bring me here? Who— who rescued me?"

The dark-eyed woman came softly across the room, and her face was close to Slingsby's as she stood near. He was looking up into eyes in which all the mystery of the Orient lay concealed, and for a single moment, Slingsby of Hoboken felt strangely indifferent to the fate which had brought him to the little room. But that indifference was only momentary. Thoughts of Holworth and of the great dam flooded his mind, and he repeated his question in a louder tone.

"Quick! Tell me! Who was it rescued me?"

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The red lips moved ever so slightly. "I did," murmured the woman. "I saved your life when the boatman had nearly strangled you."

Slingsby remained speechless for three minutes, and in that short space of time, the East placed its velvet fingers upon the engineer from New York City. It seemed as if soft little lariats were being plaited around the soul of Ulysses E. Slingsby.

To his nostrils there came a whiff of strange perfume which intoxicated him. His eyes feasted upon the beauty of the woman who stood close to him. He noted the strange jewelry on her rounded arms and finely modeled neck. A curious sense of delight at being left behind by the steamer fought with the loyalty which Slingsby had for the H. H. & H. Company which employed him.

"But why did you bring me here?" he asked feebly. "I should have been put on the steamer. I'm—I'm a first saloon passenger. I am Ulysses E. Slingsby of Hoboken, New Jersey."

"No one knew you," said the woman, slowly shaking her head. "No one knew your name, so I had you brought here. How do you say it?"

"Say what?" asked Slingsby.

"Your name," she murmured.

"Ulysses E. Slingsby," repeated the engineer.

"Isses E. Slingsby," said the woman. "I like your name, Isses."

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"Ulysses," said Slingsby.

"Isses," said the soft lips that charmed Slingsby by the manner in which they endeavored to pronounce his name. "Isses. Yes, I understand."

Slingsby gave up the attempt. It didn't much matter whether she called him "Isses" or "Ulysses," and, as she had rescued him from drowning, he could not be particular about little matters like the pronunciation of his name.

Slingsby tried to collect his thoughts. Holworth would imagine that he was at that moment moving down the Suez Canal on his way to take charge of the great dam at El-Nar. Holworth, in his twentieth-story office back in New York, would have his finger upon the atlas, fully aware of the exact spot where his engineer was at any particular moment. Holworth had a wonderful mind for details, and Slingsby knew how important it was that he should reach El-Nar at the earliest possible moment. The great dam had to be pushed forward with the utmost speed to avoid the penalty clauses in the contract.

"I must get there!" he cried. "I want to get to El-Nar as quickly as I can! I must get there at once!"

"El-Nar?" repeated the woman, whose wonderful eyes were upon the engineer.

"Yes, El-Nar!" cried Slingsby. "I am an

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engineer! Do you understand? I am the engineer in charge of the big dam, and I've got to get there as quickly as possible!"

She nodded the shapely head upon which the raven black hair was piled in a fashion that made Slingsby marvel. "I understand, Isses," she said softly. "I understand. You want to go to El-Nar?"

"You've got me," said Slingsby. "I want to get there as quickly as possible. Say, send in my clothes and I will dress. I must find out when the next boat will be along."

The woman, who was as beautiful as Zela, disappeared with a smile, and inside of three minutes, a Somali boy brought into the room the white duck suit which Slingsby had on when he was capsized from the boat in the harbor. The suit had been washed and ironed. The white silk socks also had been laundered, and the deck shoes dried and cleaned. It was only the topee that showed signs of the immersion. The topee was a crumpled mass, and Slingsby laughed grimly as the Somali boy held it up for inspection.

"It's all right, my boy," said the engineer. "I'll buy another one. I guess my wallet—" Slingsby broke off and sprang for the white jacket. A horrible thought had come to him. Perhaps his wallet had dropped out of the coat pocket during his

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struggle with the boatman, and he might even then be penniless in a strange town.

The chilling surmise turned out to be a certainty. There was no wallet in the pocket of the coat. Neither was there any news of its discovery. After Slingsby had dressed himself, the dark-eyed woman assured him that there was no money or papers in his clothes when he was rescued from the water.

Slingsby was fearfully excited. He was at a loss what to do. The steamer had gone on without him, and he had no money with which to pay his passage on another boat. He had not even the price of a cable that would inform Holworth of his position.

"What shall I do?" he cried, turning upon the woman whose shapely hands had pulled him out of the water. "What the dickens will I do?"

The black-eyed woman remained silent, watching Slingsby, whose face showed the consternation he felt at finding that his wallet had disappeared.

"What shall I do? I haven't got a dollar to cable with."

She understood then, and to Slingsby's surprise, she produced two sovereigns and tendered them to him.

"You can use those," she cried. "Take them. I will loan them to you."

Slingsby started to stammer out protests, but she

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would not listen. She assured him that he was welcome to the money, and, at last, he decided to accept her offer.

“I want to cable my bosses,” he said — “the Holworth, Hyde & Heppler Company, ’way over in the United States. I want to tell them how I am fixed. They will cable me money right here and then I will be able to repay you.”

The woman clapped her hands, and an aged Arab appeared to guide Slingsby to the office of the Eastern Cable Company. Slingsby was much excited. In his hurry to send a cable he forgot to address one word of thanks to her for saving him from drowning. He could only think of the position in which the unfortunate accident placed his employers, who had carefully reckoned up every minute of the time it would take to construct the El-Nar Dam. Even with Slingsby pushing the work, they doubted if they could avoid the penalties which would be inflicted if the job was not finished by contract time; and Slingsby, in a mad fever of excitement, ran at a jog trot towards the offices of the Cable Company.

He sent the cable, and then, somewhat soothed, it dawned upon him that he hadn’t offered one word of thanks to the woman who had rescued him. He was relieved to find that the Arab guide was still with him, and he immediately turned back to the

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house to offer thanks and apologies for his somewhat brusque departure. He told himself that she would understand when he explained that he was the engineer in charge of a great work which could not be delayed.

And Slingsby was correct. The black-eyed lady understood and sympathized. Slingsby wondered at her powers of understanding. He wondered as he listened to her consoling words. In fact, at that moment she was to Slingsby a source of consolation that made him truly thankful. Port Said was foreign to the engineer from Hoboken. The whole city was strange and unreal, yet his good fortune was wonderful.

"Holworth will cable at once," said Slingsby. "He'll send me the coin the moment he gets the news. The dam has got to be pushed with all speed."

When night came down upon Port Said, the dark-eyed rescuer made a further loan. Slingsby refused the use of the room in which he had awakened that morning; and the woman, smiling at his refusal, advanced him the money to pay for a room at the Continental.

"But you will come and see me?" she murmured. "Tomorrow, Isses?"

"Yes, tomorrow," said Slingsby. "I'll come to pay you back and say good-by tomorrow. The Ger-

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man boat will be here by noon and I'll get a passage on her. Holworth will send the coin.”

But Holworth sent no coin. A long day passed without any cable from H. H. & H. Company, and Slingsby's nerves went to pieces. It was the soft voice of the dark-eyed woman that soothed him during that long day. She told him that everything would be all right, that he must be patient. The Company would surely send him the necessary funds, and, till then, she would think it a pleasure to advance him enough for board and lodging.

Slingsby found it hard to accept the loan, but it was tendered in a manner that soothed the qualms he felt. Slingsby, thinking much of the El-Nar Dam and of the dilatory Holworth, tried now to form a proper estimate of the woman who had befriended him. He tried to guess at her nationality. There was color in her veins, but it was so slight that Slingsby told himself it wasn't enough to make a fuss about. She told him that she was the widow of a French officer, and Slingsby believed.

Slingsby borrowed another sovereign and sent another cable. He was angry with Holworth. He, Slingsby, was not to blame. He had been knocked overboard by the Arab boatman who had collided with the hawser in the dusk of the evening. He had nearly lost his life as well as his money, and he could not understand why Holworth refused to

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send sufficient funds to hurry him on his way.

“He’s mad!” he repeated over and over again. “He’s a lunatic to delay things like this! Every minute counts, and he knows how we will lose other contracts if we can’t get through this in the time we promised.” Slingsby was thinking of the Malbar, Fincham people, and how they would be overjoyed at hearing of any delay in connection with the contract for the big dam.

It was on the third evening after his immersion that the dark-eyed woman told Slingsby the story of Sleth of the Wonderful Ears. Perhaps she did it with a view of diverting Slingsby’s mind from his misfortunes. Anyhow, Slingsby was interested.

It is an old story, the story of Sleth. It is told from Abulaba to Obok, and from Ain Hamed to Mesnah. It has been told for seventeen hundred years. It has come down through the centuries, a pathetic little tale concerning the waiting maid of the Princess Azra, whose hearing was so keen that she could hear a whisper uttered by a person miles and miles away. Her hearing was so acute that she could hear the whispers of desert lovers far out beyond the Bitter Waters; and the fame of Sleth went up and down the land. To her the little grains of sand spoke with soft voices. To her the night breezes carried the faintest murmurings. To

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her wonderful ears came everything; but Sleth, gifted with this power, was not wise. She heard the Captain of the Guard whisper soft words to the Princess, and she was stupid enough to tell. The Princess was angry, very angry. She ordered the Captain of the Guard to cut off Sleth's wonderful ears, and the Captain of the Guard was only too willing to comply.

It was then that Allah performed the miracle that gave Sleth undying fame. Two tiny gold ears were brought to Sleth by a winged *peri* who came from the Paradise of the Faithful, and with these delicate ears, which were wonderfully modeled, she could hear even more distinctly than she had heard with the ears of which she had been deprived.

The whole world became a soundingboard to which she listened. The breezes that blew across from Mecca brought to her the chanting of pilgrims, the sounds of festivals and the songs of the desert shepherds. The winds that came from the sea brought her the chanteys of sailor-men out on the deep waters, the songs of the pearl fishers from far-off Bahrein, and the fierce yells of the pirates who prowled up and down the Persian Gulf.

It was all a wonderful story to Slingsby—Slingsby, who was upset and irritated by the delay. As he listened to it, he forgot Holworth. He forgot the dangers which threatened the H. H. & H.

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Company through his misfortune. His mind built up a picture of the wonderful ears, as the woman with the voice that was as soft as the murmur of the El-Nath waterfall told him the story. The dark-haired woman was a wonderful story teller.

"Gee, that's a yarn! Reads like a yellow-press Sunday story," he cried.

"It is true," murmured the woman.

"Sure," said Slingsby. "I bet if I doubted it that you could show me the little gold ears."

The dark-eyed woman stared at Slingsby for a few minutes as if his remark caused her some surprise; then she stood up slowly and walked towards him. "I could show you the ears," she said, her voice keyed soft and low. "If you would help me, we could get them. See, I have the plans which tell me the exact spot where Sleth is buried. They were given to me by Zuphra the Wise, and no one else has the information. You are learned in such things, Isses, and you will be able to understand. It is somewhere within two days' journey of this place, but my poor little brain cannot grasp the details."

She placed before Slingsby several rolls of parchment on which were many drawings and much writing in Arabic; and Slingsby of Hoboken, flattered by her appeal to his intelligence, started to pore over the curious drawings which filled the sheets.

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In the hours that followed, the woman with the soft, musical voice was at Slingsby's elbow as he pored over the chart. A strange, heady perfume came from her filmy garments; her eyes shone with a light that had a peculiar effect upon Slingsby each time he glanced at her.

“The little gold ears were buried with Sleth,” she murmured. “All my life I have thought of finding them, Isses, but I have never found anyone who could read the chart.”

“It is something of a puzzle to read,” said Slingsby.

“But you can do it, Isses,” she murmured. “You can do it.”

And Slingsby, fed with flattering words, stared at the chart and used his engineering skill in an effort to puzzle out the position of the tomb of Sleth.

Next morning Slingsby sent another cable, the fourth. In the afternoon, he sent another. The dark-eyed woman paid. Slingsby felt that his indebtedness to her was mounting up. She advanced the money for his meals and his room.

The following day, Slingsby sent two more cables, but no reply came from Holworth. Slingsby stormed. He looked towards New York and cursed Holworth and the H. H. & H. Company for refusing to answer his messages. Slingsby had an idea

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that Holworth was so disgusted with him that he wouldn't honor him with a cable to say that his messages had been received.

And during those days, when Slingsby's mind was in a ferment, the dark-eyed woman soothed it by telling him stories of the wonderful Sleth and inducing him to help her in her effort to locate the exact position of the tomb. And Slingsby became curiously interested in Sleth of the Wonderful Ears. Day after day, to divert his mind from the fix he was in, he would pore over the curious parchment charts, and he would listen with wonder to the stories the woman told.

"If I could find the place, Isses!" she would murmur softly. "If I could only find the tomb! Do you see what they have written here? It tells that the ears of Sleth, the little gold ears, Isses, were buried with her. They laid them on her breast when she died."

And Slingsby, listening day after day, as he waited for the cable which never came, became more and more interested in the finding of the tomb of the wonderful Sleth.

There came a morning, at last, when Slingsby cursed the H. H. & H. Company to the uttermost ends of perdition. He damned Holworth and Heppler and Hyde, with their subchiefs and office staff. He damned the El-Nar work and prayed that

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the penalty clauses in the contract would ruin the company by whom he was employed. Three weeks of waiting in Port Said had upset the mind of Ulysses E. Slingsby. The atmosphere of the place had a peculiar effect upon him. He was dazed and stupid. The inaction had brought upon him a mild form of insanity. And one morning he rode into the desert, side by side with the dark-eyed woman.

"We will find the tomb, Isses," she murmured as they rode on into the white sunshine. "I know we will, Isses."

"I think so," said Slingsby. "Why, yes, I believe we will."

The desert swallowed up Slingsby and the woman, and the two Arab servants who rode with them. The great sand stretches unrolled before them, and the dunes, like the graves of gods, rose behind them in countless numbers.

Slingsby forgot that he was Slingsby. The desert blotted out his individuality. Sometimes he felt certain that he had never seen New York, that no such company existed as the H. H. & H. and that the fat Holworth was but the figment of a dream.

Men who see for the first time great stretches of smooth sand upon which the sun beats till it looks like a bed of crushed diamonds, often suffer from the strange form of aphasia which attacked

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Slingsby. In those days in the desert he forgot everything but the fact that he had promised the dark-eyed woman to locate the tomb of Sleth by means of the chart which she had given him.

"We will find it, Isses," she would murmur again and again, her voice coming to Slingsby like sweet music from afar.

"Yes, we shall find it," Slingsby would mutter. "I have calculated everything correctly and I know that we will strike the right place."

And Ulysses E. Slingsby was safe in making his boast. He had made his calculations with care and precision. There came an afternoon when the little cavalcade halted near an oasis, and Slingsby, slipping from his camel, turned to his companion.

"If the tomb exists, it is within a hundred yards of where I am standing," he said. "I am certain of that."

"Oh! Isses!" murmured the woman. "Oh, if you are really right!"

Slingsby was right. Holworth had always said that Slingsby's soul was composed of blue prints, and the manner in which he had gathered his information from the parchment charts made one think that Holworth was correct in his diagnosis. Slingsby had located the exact spot. Ten hours after their arrival at the little oasis in the desert, the two Arab servants were busy shoveling the sand

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from a great slab of stone which Slingsby felt was the door of the tomb he sought.

That was a wonderful morning for Slingsby and for his companion. With much trouble they displaced the stone which formed the entrance to the rock tomb, and side by side, they entered. The tomb was hewn out of the solid rock, and resting on the floor was a stone sarcophagus upon the lid of which were Arabic characters which the woman deciphered while Slingsby held a light for her to read.

Slingsby thrilled as he listened. It was the tomb of Sleth that he had discovered. From the marble slab the dark-eyed woman read the story of the wonderful ears. Beneath the slab lay Sleth of the gold ears—Sleth, for whom Allah had worked a miracle when the anger of the Princess had deprived her of the organs which gathered the faintest whispers from the desert air.

Slingsby rigged up a hoist, and with the aid of the two Arabs, he swung the great slab from the sarcophagus. Slingsby was drunk then, intoxicated by the sunshine and the desert and the stories which he had heard concerning the person whose mummified figure lay before their eyes when the big slab had been dragged aside. He hadn't a thought of Holworth or the Construction Company. He was afire with the excitement produced by the discovery.

Slingsby and the woman ordered the two Arabs

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out of the chamber. Then they proceeded very carefully to unwind the linen cloth which covered the mummied form. They did not speak. Their lips could not utter a sound, and Slingsby breathed heavily as he helped his rescuer to unwind the long strips which crumbled beneath their fingers. The woman was murmuring something which seemed to Slingsby to be a cross between a chant and a prayer, something which he took to be an invocation to the Lords of Death to protect them from any punishment which might come to them for desecrating the tomb of the dead.

And then, halfway in the work of unrolling the mummy, the woman stopped with a shout of joy and gladness. She sprang forward with hands outstretched, and Slingsby thrust his head close to view the object which had attracted her. A fold of linen which the engineer had turned, disclosed two tiny ears of beaten gold, and the dark-eyed woman clutched at them. They lay upon the breast of Sleth; and Slingsby, the blood pounding madly through his head, knelt and stared. The woman's face was alight with a great joy. The black eyes were flaming with excitement. Her face was wonderful to look upon as she took up the two little gold ears and held them close to her bosom.

"They are the wonderful ears, Isses!" she cried.
"The wonderful ears!"

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Slingsby turned again to the figure from which they had stripped the linen wrappings. For a moment he stared at it; then he, in turn, gave a cry and stepped forward. In turning to look at the little ears, he had dragged aside a thick fold of cloth; and now, as he looked, the light from the torch was gathered up by a shining mass and thrown back to him in beams of all the colors of the rainbow. Slingsby put out his hands and touched the glittering mass. His lean fingers touched precious stones that flamed as he lifted them up.

As he disturbed the heap, single stones of wondrous beauty rolled along the linen, yellow with age, making spots of colored fire as they rolled. They were wonderful gems, gems that seemed to flash now with extraordinary brilliancy as if they were hungry for the light that had been denied them for centuries and centuries.

Slingsby couldn't tell how long he and the woman stared at the precious stones. He thinks it must have been hours. He is sure it must have been hours. It was midday when they pulled the slab of stone from off the sarcophagus, and night had fallen upon the desert when they came to their senses. During these hours, they had done nothing else but fondle the magnificent gems and endeavor stupidly to calculate the worth of each.

There were stones of every kind: great rubies

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that resembled monster drops of congealed blood; emeralds more brilliant than the big stone that was set in the turban of the Prophet; pearls that had come from the Arabian Sea when the pearl fisheries were new; diamonds that threw out shafts of white light when they brought the torch near them.

The great pile of gems held them spellbound, and it was only the coming of the night that brought them back to their senses.

The dark-eyed woman, more practical than Slingsby, suggested that they cover up the stones lest the two Arab servants should obtain a glimpse of them. Hurriedly she took off a silk scarf which she wore and placed upon it the glittering stones. Then, tying it carefully, she took it in her hand and led Slingsby out onto the sand that was still warm from the hot breath of the afternoon sun.

It was then that the woman remembered the wonderful ears of Sleth. She had placed the little ears of beaten gold within her bosom when Slingsby had drawn her attention to the shining mass of gems; and now as they stood outside the tomb, she took them out and lifted them to her ears.

Slingsby was staring at the desert. Far across the sands, a great bar of light was traveling eastward, and Slingsby watched it. The shaft of light drew his attention, and he questioned his companion.

“What is that?” he cried.

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"It is the searchlight of the German mail-boat," answered the woman. "The canal is out there. And the big German boat is going down it from Port Said to Suez."

For a moment Slingsby forgot the ears of Sleth. He was fascinated by the great beam of light which shone through the night. It seemed to drag him out of the stupor which had held him during the preceding hours. The searchlight seemed to be a great finger that threatened him as he stood and watched it. It seemed to tell him that he was Ulysses E. Slingsby of Hoboken, and that he didn't belong to the desert. Somehow or other, it brought back to him his pride in the profession to which he belonged. It made him think that he was kin to the great Frenchman who had dug that tremendous trench through four-score miles of shifting sand.

The woman interrupted his thoughts. She was speaking to him and Slingsby turned towards her. She was holding to her ears the tiny pieces of beaten gold which she assured Slingsby were the wonderful ears of Sleth. "I can hear, Isses!" she cried. "I can hear!"

A madness came over Slingsby. He gripped her arm and pointed to the great beam of light which marked the slow passage of the mail-boat.

"You can?" he asked hoarsely.

"I can," she breathed. "Yes, Isses, I can hear

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whispers from miles away across the desert."

Slingsby's grip tightened on her arm. He was in great excitement. Hastily he calculated the time that had elapsed since the evening he was upset in the waters of Port Said. Three weeks and three days had gone by, and Slingsby wondered at that moment if there was not a possibility of someone connected with the H. H. & H. Company being aboard the big boat whose great electric eye swept the canal waters. Sufficient time had elapsed to allow the Construction Company to send out a successor to take his place upon the El-Nar Dam.

Slingsby, in telling of this incident an hour later, took oath that he didn't mention his thoughts to the woman who stood beside him. He is certain of this. They were his own thoughts and he did not breathe them to her as he stood there. But his meditations were interrupted by words that thrilled him, and he turned fiercely upon the woman.

"What is it?" he cried.

"'Olworth!" she whispered. "'Olworth, Isses! He is aboard the boat!"

She was holding the two little gold ears close to her head, and Slingsby wet his dry lips and screamed at her.

"How do you know?" he cried.

"I can hear!" she murmured, her eyes shining as Slingsby thrust the torch close to her face. "I can

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hear, Isses! I can hear the whispers on the boat!”

Slingsby flung another question at her. “What — what is he saying?” he cried.

“He is telling someone about you, Isses,” she answered. “He is telling someone that you took money from someone else, and betrayed him. Wait! Wait! I will hear the name! Yes, yes, Isses! He is telling the other that you took money from the Malbar — Malbar —”

“Yes, go on!” shouted Slingsby.

“From the Malbar, Fincham Company,” she continued. “He says that you took it as a bribe and that it ruined him on the El-Nar Dam.”

Slingsby gave a cry of rage as he turned towards the great bar of light which moved slowly across the desert. The engineer was making hurried calculations. He knew that the steamers were compelled to steam slowly through the big trench, and he flung a question at his companion.

“Which is the nearest track to the canal?” he cried. “How far is it from here?”

The woman thrust her bare arm out towards the southeast. “Over there,” she murmured, “the canal is only three miles away.”

Before she had finished speaking, Ulysses E. Slingsby, crazed with the belief that Holworth of the H. H. & H. Company considered him a traitor, dashed away across the sands.

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It was the quartermaster of the big German liner who heard the cry that came up out of the waters as the boat crept quietly forward, and who flung a buoy and a rope in the direction from which the cry came. Passengers and stewards rushed from every part of the ship and the slowly turning screw stopped as the officer on the bridge heard the second yell which came from the dark waters.

The quartermaster hauled upon the rope which he had thrown into the canal, and by the aid of willing hands, both of passengers and crew, who came to his assistance, a dripping figure was hauled upon the well-deck. The rescued one stood beneath an arc lamp and stared at the group that surrounded him.

“Mr. Holworth!” he cried. “Where is Mr. Holworth?”

For a moment no one answered; then the assistant purser pushed his way to the front of the group. “Who is it you want?” he asked.

“Mr. Holworth!” answered the man who had come up out of the night. “Mr. Holworth, of the Holworth, Hyde & Heppler Company of New York!”

A young man with a clean-cut face and firm jaw took a cigar from his mouth the moment he heard the name and elbowed his way towards the half-drowned man who stood beneath the light.

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“Holworth isn’t aboard,” said the young man. “He’s in New York. That’s my Company, the H. H. & H. I am their engineer going out to the El-Nar Dam. What is it you wanted to see Holworth about? Why, it’s Slingsby!”

He sprang forward and gripped the hand of the dripping Slingsby, and Slingsby, gasping weakly, blinked as he returned the handclasp.

“And—and Holworth isn’t on board?” he asked.

“No,” answered the young man. “He’s in New York, Slingsby. What put that into your head? He sent me out to—to take your—you know, Slingsby. Something went wrong, didn’t it? Something went wrong at Port Said?”

“Holworth wouldn’t answer my cable,” said Slingsby.

“Wouldn’t answer?” cried the other.

“Wouldn’t answer,” repeated Slingsby. “I sent seven cables and didn’t get an answer.”

The young man gave a whistle of astonishment. “Why, there’s some mess up somewhere,” he cried. “Holworth sent you a score of cables. I know he did. I was in the office, Slingsby, and I know. He cabled you money and instructions, and why the devil you didn’t get them, I cannot tell. Where did you come from now?”

Slingsby forgot the crowd. He forgot the circle of passengers and stewards. He saw only the

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representative of the company for which he had worked for years, and to the young man with the strong jaw who was going out to do the work on the El-Nar Dam which he, Slingsby, should have done, he stammered out the story. In a high-pitched voice, he told of the upsetting of the boat in Port Said harbor, and of the dark-eyed woman who had advanced him the money for cables and for board and lodging. He told the story of Sleth of the Wonderful Ears, of the tomb that contained the treasure and the little ears of beaten gold; and last of all, he told how the dark-eyed woman, with the little ears pressed to the sides of her head, had told him that she heard remarks which she assured him were made by Holworth on board the big German liner.

“She said that Holworth said that I sold the H. H. & H. to the Malbar, Fincham crowd!” he cried. “She said she heard him! I ran three miles across the desert to get here to tell him—to tell him that it was a lie!”

The young man stepped closer and gripped Slingsby’s hand.

“Holworth didn’t say it,” he said. “I don’t know what he thought, Slingsby, but he didn’t say it. But the woman, Slingsby? What—what did she know of the Malbar, Fincham crowd? Eh? And those gems? Don’t you think she wanted to

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get rid of you just now, Slingsby, and — faked up all that fool business about hearing Holworth's voice? Don't you — Stop him! *Stop him!*”

Slingsby had made a mad rush for the rail, and three stewards flung themselves upon him. He tried to fight himself free, but his efforts were futile. Despite his kicking and struggling, they carried him into a cabin, with the young man of the H. H. & H. Company and the ship's doctor giving directions as they walked alongside.

“I don't care, Slingsby,” said his successor. “I don't care what you lose. You can't do another swimming stunt tonight. And you'd lose your way, you fool! We'll be at Suez in the morning, and you can do what you like then.”

Slingsby, much excited, left the German boat at Suez and came back up the canal in an old tramp steamer bound for Alexandria. He induced the captain of the tramp to put him ashore at the spot where he had boarded the German boat on the previous evening, and then Ulysses E. Slingsby started out across the desert.

Slingsby found the tomb and the half unwrapped form which had been lifted from the sarcophagus on the previous day. But he found nothing else. The dark-eyed woman and the two Arab servants had disappeared, and with the dark-eyed woman went the mass of blazing gems which had stupefied

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Slingsby through the long hours that passed after their discovery.

Slingsby walked back to the canal and came up to Port Said on a dredge belonging to the company. He was a changed man. He was silent and bad-tempered, and answered in monosyllables the questions that were put to him by the man aboard the dredge.

Five years have passed since then, and Slingsby's story has drifted into the bazaar. He lives in the little dark room at Al-Kasim's smelly boarding house in Pasaca Street; and there, like an owl sitting in the semi-darkness, he passes the long day. But when night comes down upon the "Gateway of the East," Slingsby goes abroad. He goes up into the Arab quarter and walks through street after street till dawn. When Allah dips his fingers in living chrome and draws his hand across the Eastern sky, Slingsby returns to his room. The bazaar gossips say that he is looking always for the woman who robbed him of his share of the wonderful gems he found in the tomb of Sleth.

The Holworth, Hyde & Heppler Company lost a considerable sum of money on the El-Nar Dam. The delay caused by the unfortunate happening to Slingsby when the hawser upset the boat brought innumerable penalties upon them, and the Malbar,

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Fincham Company have wrested from them a score of contracts since that time. Holworth, senior partner of the H. H. & H., snorted contemptuously when he read the story which Slingsby's successor wrote of the meeting on board the German liner.

“Precious stones!” growled Holworth, on reading the letter. “I know! That woman was in the employ of the Malbar, Fincham crowd, and she bulldozed the fool. Glory be! What idiots men are!”

But Holworth may not be right. What is set down here is a story that has lived for five years, and the life of a lie, according to the Koran, is only as long as the life of one of the red cactus beetles that flit for an instant in the sunshine before they die.

